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UNDER THE SEARCH-LIGHT

Aequam memento rebus in arduis
Servare mentem.

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Probationary Officers at the W.R.A.F. Training Depot, Avery Hill, August, 1918

Presented to Miss V. Douglas-Pennant *by the W.R.A.F. Staff*

UNDER THE SEARCH-LIGHT

A RECORD OF A GREAT SCANDAL

BY

VIOLET DOUGLAS-PENNANT

"Y gwir yn erbyn y byd"

WITH FOUR ILLUSTRATIONS

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STATEMENT

By the Violet Douglas-Pennant Committee who arranged for the publication of this volume.

AFTER the House of Lords Inquiry into the dismissal of Miss Violet Douglas-Pennant, a group of people, feeling that a grave injustice had been done to a valuable Public Servant, formed a Committee to sift the facts which had not been allowed to emerge at that Inquiry. At the urgent demand of a number of ex-Service Men and Women and others who desired the truth to be known, the Committee requested Miss Douglas-Pennant to write the facts published in this book; and they take upon themselves the responsibility of placing these facts before the public, in the conviction that this matter cannot be allowed to remain where it is.

In view of the reports prevailing at the time of the Inquiry, to the effect that Miss Douglas-Pennant was a woman of no experience, the Committee herewith append a record of some of her public work :—

1899–1918.

Resident Voluntary Worker at Lady Margaret Hall Settlement.

Joint Hon. Organising Secretary, Finsbury Social Workers' Association (Infants' Milk Depot and Welfare Centre).

Co-opted Member, Finsbury Borough Council (Unemployment Committee).

Member of London Central (Unemployed) Body for dealing with unemployment of Men and Women.

Co-opted Member, London County Council Old Age Pensions Central Committee.

Many years Manager of L.C.C. Schools.

Stood for L.C.C. as official (Municipal Reform) Candidate, South Islington.

Co-opted Member, L.C.C. Education Committee.

Supervising Member (L.C.C.) for Streatham, Wandsworth, Greenwich, Woolwich, and Deptford Old Age Pensions Committees.

Chairman, L.C.C. Training College for Women Teachers, Graystoke Place.

Chairman, L.C.C. Open-Air School, Birley House.

Chairman, L.C.C. Blind School, Elm Court.

Member of L.C.C. Deaf School Committee (Anerley).

Member of L.C.C. School Attendance Committee, Finsbury.

Member of L.C.C. Remand Homes Committee.

Member of L.C.C. Industrial Schools Committee.

Member of "Higher Education" Committee, L.C.C. (Polytechnics, Trade Schools, Secondary Schools, and Evening Schools).

Member of L.C.C. Elementary Schools Committee.

Member of L.C.C. Special Schools Committee.

Member of L.C.C. "Care and Feeding of School Children" Committees.

Member of Central Church Executive Committee.

Member of Executive Pan-Anglican Committee.

Member of Women's S.P.G. Executive Committee and Selection Board for Teachers.

Member of Advisory Committee Clergy Orphan School (St. Margaret's), Bushey.

Member of Executive "Wage-earning Children" Committee.

Member of Executive Committee "Care of Defective Children."

Member of C.O.S. District Committee (City and Holborn).

Member of the Executive Committee and Council of Lady Margaret Hall Settlement.

Member of Lambeth Skilled Appenticeship Committee.

Hon. Member of Federation of University Women.

Governor of the South Wales (and Mon.) University College, Cardiff.

Member of Committee of Aberdare Hall for Women Students, Cardiff.

Member of Executive and Selection Committee for Training Medical Women Students (Wales).

Member of Appointments Board (Wales).

Hon. Treasurer, Loan Training Fund for Educated Women Workers.

Member of Executive Committee of "Education for National Service."

Member of Executive Overseas Education Fund.

Member of Workers' Educational Association.

Lady Superintendent for Wales of the Priory of St. John's Ambulance Association.

Hon. Diocesan Secretary, Waifs and Strays Society (North Wales Fund).

Associate of Girls' Friendly Society (Head of Lodges and Lodging Dept.), Bangor Diocese.

For many years a helper and organiser of numerous Social and Athletic Clubs for Boys and Girls.

Vice-President and Member of Executive, Women's Municipal Party.

Vice-President of Association of Women Clerks and Secretaries.

Member of Council of Unionist Women's Franchise Association.

Member of Society of Oddfellows.

Hon. Lady-in-waiting to H.R.H. Princess Louise (Duchess of Argyll) (1911–1916).

Member of Executive of the Welsh Housing and Development Association (North and South Wales Branches).

Member of Reconstruction Committee (North and South Wales Branches).

Member of Treasury Departmental Committee on "Finance and Simplification of the Insurance Act" (Ryan Committee).

National Health Insurance Commissioner (Wales), November, 1911–June, 1918.

WAR WORK, 1914–AUGUST, 1918.

In the first week of the war fitted out in one day Emergency Hospital (500 beds) for Belgian wounded. Funds generously subscribed by residents in Cardiff, who telegraphed amount of donations to Miss Douglas-Pennant in London. She selected equipment and took supplies same evening to Dover for shipment.

Member of the Committee for collecting funds to equip a Welsh Unit for the Scottish Women's Hospitals in Serbia.

Chairman of the Committee for selecting Nursing Staff for Scottish Women's Hospital Unit in Serbia.

Member of Executive Committee of South Wales and Glamorganshire Hospital, at Berque (France).

Member of Special Statutory Committee for providing Treatment, Training, and Employment for Discharged Disabled Sailors and Soldiers, 1916–1918.

Member of Executive of National Fund for providing comforts for Welsh Troops.

Member of Executive of Welsh National Fund for Disabled Sailors and Soldiers.

Helped to set up Special Voluntary Hospitals for Shell-Shock, Neurasthenic, and Orthopædic Cases.

Member of Executive and Trustee of Enham (Village Centres Council). Obtained £30,000 as loan to enable the Committee to buy the Estate for Special Cases.

Member of Committee for sending parcels of food to Prisoners of War (Wales).

Member of Committee to organise a Fund and Hospitality to enable relatives of wounded Sailors and Soldiers from far distant homes to visit them in Hospital.

Helped to start numerous Committees for making Hospital necessaries.

Member of Executive Committee set up to keep in touch with widows and dependents of those killed in the Battle of Jutland, and to administer Overseas Fund for educating the children

Member of South Wales Belgian Refugee Committee.

Collected large sum of money in Cardiff for the Belgian Refugees Central Committee, and when in London worked at night for the Belgian Refugees' Committee, London—meeting refugees at stations.

Member of Committee of Queen Mary's Unemployment Fund for Women, Cardiff.

When man-power shortage became acute, Miss Douglas-Pennant suggested to the authorities, that in order to release men, women should be enrolled in Official Corps. Shortly afterwards the W.A.A.C. was started. Later when rumours of irregularities were spread concerning this Corps, Miss Douglas-Pennant helped to get up large meetings (both public and private) of representative women in Wales to put a stop to the idle gossip reflecting on the W.A.A.C.

Miss Douglas-Pennant spoke in many parts of the country at recruiting meetings for the W.A.A.C., W.R.N.S., Women's Legion, Red Cross, Munition and Canteen workers, Land Army, and other women's work.

Helped to start various clubs for war workers.

Accompanied H.R.H. Princess Louise (Duchess of Argyll) to France (1916) on her visit to Military, British Red Cross, French, American, and Indian Hospitals, and Canteens.

When it was decided by a large number of political opponents as well as friends of the Prime Minister (Mr. Lloyd George) to make him a presentation as a mark of appreciation for his war services, Miss Douglas-Pennant, though brought up in an entirely different political camp, was invited to make the presentation and to speak at Downing Street on the advantages of co-operation, in order to emphasise the fact that hearty co-operation existed between all parties.

Appointed Commandant, Women's Royal Air Force, June 18th, 1918.

August 16th, 1918, asked General Paine's leave to resign Commandantship as a protest against certain irregularities.

August 17th, 1918. Resignation refused by Lord Weir and General Paine on the ground that Miss Douglas-Pennant's services were too valuable.

August 28th, 1918. Summarily dismissed from the Commandantship and the Corps, by direction of Lord Weir and Sir Auckland Geddes on the advice of Lady Rhondda, who acted without enquiry on secret information supplied to her, as well as to Mr. Tyson Wilson, M.P., and Miss P. Strachey, by Mrs. Beatty and others.

December, 1921.

INTRODUCTION.

I HAVE been urged by a number of people—lovers of justice and fairplay—to make public the true facts surrounding my summary dismissal from the Women's Royal Air Force, so that my name and honour may at last be vindicated from the slurs unjustly cast on them.

During the House of Lords Inquiry, many points of vital importance were insufficiently brought out or not brought out at all. Now that the War is officially at an end (September 1st, 1921) there can be no reason on the score of official secrecy why the public should not be made aware of the events which led to my instant dismissal from the post of Commandant and from the Corps. This step was taken without the knowledge of my Senior Officer (Major-General Sir Godfrey Paine), and without any adverse report from him. The whole of this affair has been wrapped in mystery and distinguished by astonishing prevarication on the part of the authorities.

Below are a few of the contradictory reasons given by Ministers and others for my dismissal :—

General Brancker—a total stranger—when he dismissed me, declared :—

"You are very efficient, but grossly unpopular with everyone who has ever seen you."

General Seely, Air Minister, in an interview, informed certain Members of Parliament that I was "a very incompetent woman." When challenged on this point in the House of Commons, shortly afterwards, he made a complete *volte face* and declared :—

"It was never said that she was inefficient—in fact it was expressly said she was most efficient. . . . . In the opinion of the competent authority, Miss Douglas-Pennant was one of the most competent and efficient ladies in England or Wales, there are not words strong enough to say how highly I regard Miss Douglas Pennant and the services she has rendered to the State."

On the other hand, Lord Londonderry (Additional Member of the Air Council) informed the House of Lords that I was incompetent and inefficient, and, to confirm this, quoted from a letter which he said that Lord Weir had written to tell me of his intention to supersede me for these reasons. No such letter was received by me. The only letter I received from Lord Weir was dated ten days after my summary dismissal and contained the assurance that "there was nothing which reflected in any way on your capacity or efficiency."

It is equally difficult to reconcile the assertion made by the Air Ministry in the written Statement of Case, prepared for the Select Committee, that—

> "Miss Douglas-Pennant was removed from the post of Commandant of the Women's Royal Air Force because, in the opinion of H.M. Secretary of State for the Royal Air Force (Lord Weir), she was incompetent to discharge the duties of the office and for no other reason."

During the Inquiry, Lord Weir repudiated any responsibility for the Air Ministry's Statement of Case—to quote his words: "*I do not know anything about it . . . I have had very little to do with this case.*"

A still more serious reason was given by the late Whip of the Labour Party, who declared on what he alleged was the authority of the Secretary of the Air Ministry, that I had been dismissed owing to the discovery that I was a bully, a virago, and a woman of disreputable character, with a bad personal and official record in Wales.

Lord Peel (Under-Secretary for War) denied in the House of Lords, a year after my dismissal, the allegations against my personal character and said:—

> "Her character is unassailed and unassailable—it stands far above any detraction that any man could ever suggest or bring against her . . . . it is even an insult to the lady to suggest that such a matter could be discussed."

Lord Peel, on the same occasion, gave an entirely new reason for my dismissal when he stated that three W.R.A.F. officers "were actually dismissed from their posts on the representations of Miss Douglas-Pennant"—a grotesque perversion of truth, as I never dismissed or brought about the dismissal of any officers.

These statements are inconsistent with the reply given in the House of Commons by Major (now Sir John) Baird, Parliamentary Secretary, in reply to questions a fortnight before my dismissal :—

> "The Air Council have every confidence in this lady's ability and discretion . . . She was appointed to her present position because her experience and qualifications rendered her in the view of the Air Council the most suitable person available."

What can have occurred during the few intervening days to cause Lord Weir to instruct General Brancker to throw me out of the Corps and order me to leave the office immediately, before a successor had been appointed ? It was not until the last day of the Inquiry that a ray of light was thrown on this mystery, when it emerged for the first time that my dismissal was brought about by secret "serious" information supplied by a total stranger to Lady Rhondda, who admitted that she had accepted it without inquiry. This information she communicated to Sir Auckland Geddes (Minister of National Service), who, to quote Lord Wrenbury's words, "compelled" Lord Weir to dismiss me. Lord Weir admitted that he took this step without any investigation, and to this day I have never been allowed to know of what I was accused.

It is possible that those who do me the honour of reading these pages may feel that elementary justice calls for replies to the following questions :—

1.—What was the nature of these mysterious charges, and why have I never been given any opportunity of refuting them ?

2.—How did it come about that there is no record of this affair, and that the correspondence which passed between Sir Auckland Geddes and Lord Weir on this subject was declared by them when called for by my Counsel to have been "lost" (both copies and original) by the Ministry of National Service as well as by the Air Ministry ?

3.—Why was no inquiry made by the Select Committee into the nature of these charges, and why was Lady Rhondda's informant not subpœnaed by the Court to substantiate them ?

4.—Why was the attention of the Select Committee focussed instead on an unpleasant incident which had nothing to do with my dismissal, as it occurred six months after I had been removed from the W.R.A.F., and of which I heard for the first time in a speech made by Lord Stanhope in the House of Lords ?

5.—Why did Lord Wrenbury, by imposing on me prohibitive financial terms, make it impossible for certain witnesses to be heard regarding the alleged irregularities at Hurst Park?

6.—Why did the Court rule out as irrelevant certain matters connected with W.R.A.F. clothing (to which attention had been previously drawn by the Public Accounts Committee) on the ground that the Air Ministry had already decided the matter?

In the following statement it will be seen that all important points are fully corroborated, either by documentary evidence or by extracts from the evidence of witnesses. I have endeavoured to write as impersonally as possible, as I am only a name in a matter which involves a fundamental principle, *i.e.*, the right of an accused person to know what charges are brought against him, and to be given an opportunity of defending himself before he is condemned, dismissed, discredited—and, as in my case, financially ruined—and ostracised.

From the outset of the House of Lords Inquiry it was plain that it would be impossible for me to emerge successfully, as it was ruled by the Chairman (Lord Wrenbury) that I must prove wrongful dismissal, and that my case must be taken first. Lord Wrenbury lays down in his Report, that as Lord Weir, in the opinion of the Committee, honestly believed that my removal was in the public interest, he was at liberty to order it, and that consequently I have no grounds for complaint. I have never for one moment suggested that Lord Weir did not act in what he "honestly believed" at the time to be in the public interest (it has never been my wish to prove the contrary). I firmly maintain, however, that Lord Weir and Sir Auckland Geddes, who knew nothing of me or my work, allowed themselves to be influenced by pressure from prejudiced people, on whose information they acted without any investigation. I can only leave it to my readers (who are as well qualified to form an opinion, based on facts, as the four Peers and the distinguished Chancery Judge who presided over them) to decide as to the justification I have for holding this view.

In the Report, I am depicted as an impossible woman of bad and vindictive disposition, suffering from

"incapacity to see things in their true perspective," and "eager to find evil which did not exist."

Notwithstanding this unanimous verdict, a Member of the Committee (Lord Denbigh) in a letter—now in my possession—written to a stranger shortly after the publication of the Report, assured his correspondent that:—

> "Nobody questions the past valuable and honourable public service of Miss Douglas-Pennant, nor her amiability of character."

One of my reasons for writing this book is my desire to protest with all my strength, against a system which is capable of being used to destroy utterly—without inquiry or warning—any individual whose only crime is a desire to serve his country honestly, and to carry out his duty. Surely the Government is militating against the best interests of the public service, and is breaking every canon of justice and fair play by its decision that in no case is redress for injustice permissible if the prestige of a Minister is involved. Lord Londonderry made this position clear in the House of Lords when on behalf of the Government, he refused to grant an Inquiry on the ground that it would be—

> "A suggestion that the Secretary of State was either moved by corrupt influences or that he was a man who by his intellectual capacity was not fitted for the position in which he was placed."

Doubtless, the public will recognise that mistakes are excusable during the stress of war-time, but fair-minded people will hardly take the view that the prestige of Lord Weir and Sir Auckland Geddes would be seriously injured if they admitted that they had been misled. In setting down the facts of this case, I have no wish to cast reflections on those who were apparently misled, or on Colonel (now Mr.) Bersey or Brig.-General G. Livingston, of whom frequent mention is made. Before the Inquiry, I believed that the latter were ring-leaders in an intrigue against me, but during the Inquiry it became evident that I was mistaken in this respect. It was pointed out to me that I had done them an injustice—I therefore felt bound to apologise and withdraw my allegations unreservedly.

I am glad to have this opportunity of expressing my warmest thanks and appreciation to my comrades in the W.R.A.F. and R.A.F. for the sympathy and confidence they have shown me; to the thousands of ex-Service men and women; to my former colleagues inside and outside the Government Service; to those members of both Houses of Parliament who, in spite of criticism and ridicule, stood firm for justice and fair play, and whose unabated confidence has afforded me such cheering support; and lastly, to the gallant band who are determined at all costs to right an injustice, and who have proved the value of true and disinterested friendship.

I greatly regret that owing to the number of references I felt bound to quote and explain, it has been impossible to shorten this statement. Many of the incidents set forth would seem unworthy of notice if considered separately. As this book, however, is intended to expose the result of the vested interests, back-stair intrigue, and lack of discipline, which are bringing discredit on some of the Government Departments, I feel bound to relate them, so that the reader may have a true picture of a state of affairs which, unfortunately, was permitted by the authorities to triumph, instead of being crushed with a strong hand.

Valuable reforms have sometimes been the outcome of apparently unimportant incidents and humble efforts. I can only hope that this exposure of modern bureaucratic methods will lead the public to insist that its servants in the future are safeguarded in the exercise of their duty, and protected from the treatment meted out to me. As for myself, I take comfort in the thought that Truth in the long run can never be defeated, and in the words of Tacitus, is "established by investigation and delay."

VIOLET DOUGLAS-PENNANT.

21st November, 1921.

CONTENTS.

PAGE

STATEMENT of the Violet Douglas-Pennant Committee ... v.

INTRODUCTION ... ... ix.

WHO'S WHO ... ... xvii.

Part I.—A Month's Look Round.

CHAPTER

I.—Chaos and Confusion 1

II.—The Things that Mattered 10

III.—Mason's Yard 20

IV.—Why I Accepted the Post 28

Part II.—Ten Weeks in the W.R.A.F.

18th JUNE, 1918—28th AUGUST, 1918.

CHAPTER

V.—Disappointed Candidates 36

VI.—War-time Deserters 48

VII.—Dame K. Furse and Mrs. Beatty 62

VIII.—Schemes and Stratagems 71

IX.—Undesirable Candidates 82

X.—Intrigue and Intimidation 88

XI.—Obstruction 95

XII.—Progress 102

XIII.—The Recruiting System 108

XIV.—Camps, Clothing, and Contracts 119

XV.—Mysteries and Misrepresentations 137

XVI.—Sudden Dismissal by General Brancker 147

XVII.—More Mystery 152

Part III.—Demanding an Inquiry.

CHAPTER PAGE
XVIII.—Sympathy and Slander 160
XIX.—Official Evasions 175
XX.—"Parliamentary Answers" 188
XXI.—Mr. Churchill's Startling Statements 201
XXII.—Campaign of Calumny 212
XXIII.—Parliamentary Pressure 229
XXIV.—"Supersession" Subterfuge 241

Part IV.—House of Lords Inquiry.

CHAPTER
XXV.—The Opening Stage 256
XXVI.—"Irrelevant" and "Irregular"? 279
XXVII.—An Amazing Attack 300
XXVIII.—Dame K. Furse's "Inaccurate Recollection" ... 336
XXIX.—Lady Rhondda's Secret Statement 356
XXX.—The Red Herring 388
XXXI.—Why Mrs. Kitto was not called and Lord Wrenbury's Prohibitive Terms 404
XXXII.—Unsolved Enigmas 419

Part V.—Retrospection.

CHAPTER
XXXIII.—Aftermath 442

APPENDIX.—Proofs of Public Opinion 455

Illustrations.

Probationary Officers at the W.R.A.F. Training Depot, Avery Hill, August, 1918 ... ... *Frontispiece*
Portrait ... ... *Facing* 168
Group of W.R.A.F. Rank and File at Avery Hill, August, 1918 266
Probationary Officers at Avery Hill, August, 1918 360

WHO'S WHO.

ANDREW, Miss K.—Assistant Commandant W.R.A.F., formerly clerk to a private firm of toy makers. Seven months in the W.A.A.C.; transferred to the W.R.A.F.; resigned 1st July, 1918; joined W.R.N.S.

BRANCKER, Major-General Sir W. S.—Major in Royal Artillery. Joined Royal Flying Corps, 1914. Promoted Major-General and Controller-General of Equipment, Royal Air Force. Member of Air Council 1918. Succeeded Major-General Sir Godfrey Paine as Master-General of Personnel, August, 1918.

BAIRD, Major J. L. (*now* Sir John L.).—Parliamentary Secretary, Air Ministry.

BERSEY, Mr. W. C.—Formerly associated with companies, now an underwriting member of Lloyds. Joined Royal Flying Corps as a 2nd-Lieutenant; placed in charge of women (known as Penguins) attached to Royal Flying Corps until the Royal Air Force was constituted. Promoted from 2nd-Lieutenant to Lieut.-Colonel (1st April, 1918) and commanded the Women's Royal Air Force (late Penguins) until Miss V. Douglas-Pennant's appointment as Commandant. Afterwards in charge of M.3 Department for recruiting, posting, and providing all supplies for the W.R.A.F.

BURLEIGH-LEACH, Mrs. (*now* Dame Florence).—Chief Controller of the Q.M.A.A.C., formerly called W.A.A.C.

BEATTY, Mrs. C.—Assistant Commandant W.R.A.F. Formerly in Women's Volunteer Reserve Corps; resigned after censure by a Court of Inquiry, 1915. Joined Women's Reserve Ambulance Corps (later known as Green Cross Corps); deposed the Commandant and took her place. Joined the W.R.N.S.; transferred to the W.R.A.F., April, 1918; resigned 1st July, 1918; rejoined the W.R.N.S

CHURCHILL, Rt. Hon. Winston, M.P.—Secretary of State for War. Succeeded Lord Weir as Head of the Air Ministry.

CRAWFORD, Lady Gertrude.—Appointed Chief Superintendent, under Lieut.-Colonel Bersey, of women (known as Penguins) attached to Royal Flying Corps.

COCKBURN, Mr. E. M.—Temporary Major attached to Colonel Bersey's Staff (M.3 Department); transferred to Equipment Department (clothing and accommodation).

CHERRY, Captain J. P., M.C. (Durham Light Infantry).—Attached to M.3 Department.

CROWDY, Miss E.—Deputy Director, W.R.N.S.

DENBIGH, Earl of.—Member of the House of Lords' Select Committee of Inquiry.

DURHAM, Miss F.—Head of Women's Employment Exchanges (Ministry of Labour).

DAVIES, Mr. J. T.—Chief Private Secretary to Mr. Lloyd George.

FARRER, Lord.—Member of the House of Lords Select Committee of Inquiry.

FLETCHER, Colonel Albert.—Twelve-and-a-half years' service in the ranks of the Royal Engineers. Transferred to Royal Flying Corps,

1914; obtained a commission; promoted to rank of Brigadier-General, and appointed Director of Air (Quarter-Master-General) Services for the Royal Air Force at home and overseas under Major-General Brancker.

FURSE, DAME KATHERINE.—Director W.R.N.S. Formerly Commandant Voluntary Aid Detachments (British Red Cross Society) from which she resigned October, 1917.

GEDDES, RIGHT HON. SIR AUCKLAND.—Minister of National Service

GEDDES, RIGHT HON. SIR ERIC.—First Lord of the Admiralty.

GWYNNE-VAUGHAN, MRS. (*now* DAME HELEN.)—Succeeded Miss V. Douglas-Pennant as Commandant W.R.A.F., September, 1918. Formerly in command of the Q.M.A.A.C. in France.

HEWART, SIR GORDON, K.C.—Attorney-General. Leading Counsel for the Air Ministry.

HARMSWORTH, MR. CECIL, M.P.—Appointed by the Prime Minister to hold an Inquiry into the cause of Miss Douglas-Pennant's dismissal. Wrote a Report which was withheld.

HAYWARD, MR. W. G.—First Class Clerk (Civil Service). Temporarily attached as Organiser to Colonel Bersey's Department, M.3.

JANSON, MR. SAM.—Motor mechanic and chauffeur. Received a commission in the Army Service Corps, 1914; Major, 1915. Joined Royal Flying Corps, 1917; posted to Hurst Park Depôt, February, 1918, as Deputy Inspector of Transport, Royal Air Force, and Head of the Training School for 500 women transport drivers, with rank of Lieut.-Colonel.

KINTORE, EARL OF.—Member of the House of Lords Select Committee of Inquiry. Father-in-law of Major Baird, the Parliamentary Secretary, Air Ministry.

KITTO, MRS. MIDDLETON.—Senior W.R.A.F. Officer at Hurst Park.

LONDONDERRY, MARQUIS OF.—Additional Member of the Air Council.

LIVINGSTON, BRIGADIER-GENERAL GUY (*formerly* MR. G. L. JACOBS).—Previously connected with the Fairfax Trust. Joined Royal Flying Corps, 1915; appointed Director of Administration, 1916; promoted Brigadier-General 1917, and Deputy Master-General of Personnel, when the Royal Air Force was constituted, 1918.

LIVINGSTON-PARRY, MRS.—Sister of Brigadier-General G. L. Livingston. One of the five candidates promised important posts by Colonel Bersey.

LEONARD, Miss V. M.—A civilian clerk, attached to Colonel Bersey at W.R.A.F. Headquarters. One of the five candidates to whom he promised important post

LATIMER, CAPTAIN O. W.—Private in the Somersetshire Light Infantry, 1905—1912. Joined Royal Flying Corps 1912, as Corporal; reverted to rank of Private. Obtained a Commission, October, 1916; Captain, 1917; Lieut.-Colonel, 1918. Appointed Head of Clothing and Rations Department for Royal Air Force at home and overseas, under Brigadier-General Fletcher (Equipment Department).

LAWRENCE, MRS.—One of the five ladies promised an important post by Colonel Bersey.

METHUEN, FIELD-MARSHAL LORD.—Member of the House of Lords Select Committee of Inquiry.

O'SULLIVAN, MISS EILEEN.—Clothing Controller, W.R.A.F. Drew attention to irregularities, and was dismissed from the post of Controller by Brig.-General Fletcher and demobilised.

PRATT, MISS F. H.—Employed before the War at the Bournville Cocoa Factory; later personal clerk to Sir A. Geddes (Ministry of Munitions); appointed Inspector of Filling Factories (Ministry of Munitions). Joined Q.M.A.A.C.; transferred to W.R.A.F.; appointed Deputy Commandant; resigned 1st July, 1918.

PAINE, MAJOR-GENERAL (*now* AIR MARSHAL) SIR GODFREY, K.C.B., M.V.O.—Master-General of Personnel, Royal Air Force, 1918. Member of Air Council. Previously Commodore, Royal Navy, and Fifth Sea Lord (Admiralty).

PEEL, VISCOUNT.—Under Secretary for War

POWELL, COLONEL DOUGLAS.—Succeeded Lieut.-Colonel Bersey as Head of M.3 Department, W.R.A.F.

Q.M.A.A.C.—Queen Mary's Auxiliary Army Corps, formerly known as W.A.A.C.

ROTHERMERE, LORD.—Secretary of State for Air, April, 1918; resigned May, 1918; succeeded by Sir William Weir (Lord Weir).

RHONDDA, VISCOUNTESS.—Wife of Sir H. Mackworth. Head of Women's Department, National Service, under Sir Auckland Geddes. Succeeded her father, Lord Rhondda, formerly Mr. D. A Thomas (Cardiff), July, 1918.

STRACHEY, MISS PHILIPPA.—Secretary, Women's Service Bureau, formerly called London Suffrage Society.

STANHOPE, COLONEL EARL, D.S.O.—Late Grenadier Guards Urged for and obtained the House of Lords Inquiry.

TAYLOR, MISS GERTRUDE.—One of the five ladies promised a high post by Colonel Bersey. Previously a V.A.D.

TAYLOR, MRS. GLENLEIGH.—One of the five ladies promised a high post by Colonel Bersey.

WILSON, MR TYSON, M.P.—Chief Whip, Labour Party. Died 1921.

WILLIAMS, MR R. F.—Transferred by the Ministry of Labour from the Employment Exchanges Department to organise and control recruiting for the W.R.A.F. under Colonel Bersey. Granted the temporary rank of Lieut.-Colonel, R.A.F.

WHITTAKER, MR G. L.—Civil Servant, Temporary Air Mechanic, R.A.F. Attached to W.R.A.F. Head Quarters.

WEIR, LORD (*formerly* MR. WILLIAM WEIR).—Managing Director of G. & J. Weir, Ships' Pumps Manufacturers, Glasgow. Attached to Ministry of Munitions, 1917, created Sir William. Appointed Secretary of State for Air, May, 1918, and created Lord Weir; resigned November, 1918.

WRENBURY, LORD.—Chairman of the House of Lords' Select Committee of Inquiry (formerly Sir Henry Buckley, a great authority on Chancery Law).

W.A.A.C.—Women's Auxiliary Army Corps, later known as Q.M.A.A.C., under the War Office.

W.R.N.S.—Women's Royal Naval Service, under the Admiralty.

W.R.A.F.—Women's Royal Air Force, under the Air Ministry.

Part I.—A Month's Look Round.

CHAPTER I.

Chaos and Confusion.

THE Air Ministry was formed as a separate entity in the early part of 1918, the Royal Flying Corps and the Royal Naval Air Service being amalgamated under the name of the Royal Air Force.

Lord Rothermere was the first Secretary of State for Air—he was succeeded shortly afterwards by Mr. Weir (Sir William Weir—Lord Weir). A few days before Lord Rothermere resigned, I received on April 24th a letter, dated April 22nd, 1918, from Major-General Sir Godfrey Paine, who had just become Master-General of Personnel, informing me that the Air Council had decided to appoint a Commandant of the Women's Royal Air Force, and that he had been instructed to offer me that post. At that time I was one of the National Health Insurance Commissioners (Wales), which appointment I had held for six-and-a-half years.

Both Lord Rothermere and Sir Godfrey Paine were total strangers to me, and I had never had any previous communication with them.

I saw General Paine on April 25th, 1918, and agreed to come to the Air Ministry for a "month's look round" on May 13th, 1918. I made this stipulation, as I had heard that there had been a good deal of friction previously at the Air Ministry and that Queen Mary's Army Auxiliary Corps (Q.M.A.A.C.) under the War Office and the Women's Royal Naval Service (W.R.N.S.) under the Admiralty, resented the setting up of a third Women's Corps, and that the Ministry of National Service and the Ministry of Labour were not in favour of this step. As I had been informed that the new Corps would have very little chance of success, I did not wish to accept the appointment and bind myself for the duration of the

war, unless I felt confident that the possibilities of making it a success would justify me in giving up my work on the Insurance Commission.

Up to May 13th, 1918, the Women's Royal Air Force (known as the W.R.A.F.) had been under the control of Brigadier-General Guy Livingston, and under the direct command of Lieut.-Colonel W. C. Bersey, with a Woman Officer, called Chief Superintendent, working under him. I heard later that they had given the Chief Superintendent notice at the end of a few weeks, since which time the Chief Inspector, Miss E. H. Pratt, had been the Senior W.R.A.F. Officer.

Mr. Bersey, who had been brought in by General Guy Livingston, was a civilian connected with Companies. He had been promoted from a 2nd Lieut. to a Lieut.-Colonel in one day, and put in charge of the W.R.A.F. His Senior Officer, Brigadier-General Livingston (formerly Mr. G. L. Jacobs), also a civilian, had himself been promoted with great rapidity. As neither of these Temporary Officers had any apparent knowledge of women's work or of the conditions necessary to ensure efficiency, discipline, and good health, strong representations were made by leading Women's Organisations, when the Chief Superintendent left, that the control of the W.R.A.F. must be placed in the hands of an experienced woman, who should be given executive powers and the same rank and status as that held by the heads of the Q.M.A.A.C. and W.R.N.S.

This request was agreed to by the Air Council, and when I was invited to become the Commandant, General Paine told me that the post of Chief Superintendent had been abolished, and that the Air Council had decided to appoint a Commandant who was to work entirely under the Master-General of Personnel, with the rank of Brigadier-General, instead of being, as heretofore, subordinate to the Section M.3, of which Colonel Bersey was in charge under Temporary Colonel Ebben and Brigadier-General Livingston.

Colonel Bersey, on the other hand, was to be the Liaison Officer between the W.R.A.F. and other Departments at the Air Ministry, and his Section M.3 was thus

responsible for procuring from the Equipment Department all the necessaries on which the success of the Corps depended—such as accommodation, pay, rations, uniforms, recruits (with the exception of Officers) and for the posting of the women rank and file recruited through the Labour Ministry Employment Exchanges to replace the men.

I was informed that I must inspect and approve or reject all such accommodation, clothing, and equipment before taking it over, as I should be held responsible for the suitability of whatever I accepted.

The Commandant was also to be responsible for the discipline of the women when inside the Hostels in the Air Force Camps, and for their training and general welfare, excepting during work hours, when they were under the control of the Man Officer commanding the Air Force Unit or Station to which they were attached.

The Commandant was expected to train and post the W.R.A.F. Officers who had been passed by the Selection and Medical Boards. The actual recruiting of the Officers, however, was done through the Ministry of Labour, which had set up a special Committee, called the Professional Classes Bureau, which dealt with all applications for Officers' posts in the W.R.A.F.

The Selection Board consisted of members of the W.R.A.F. Headquarters' Staff and Labour Ministry Officials, and was held weekly at the Labour Ministry's Central Employment Exchange Office.

When I arrived at the Headquarters of the W.R.A.F., it was in a state of indescribable chaos (*see* pages 26, 27, 64). According to Lady Rhondda's statement to Sir Auckland Geddes, the Office had been running for several months (*see* pages 242, 243, 360, 361).

The Women's side of the H.Q. Office was called W.M.3, and the W.R.A.F. Officers consisted of one Deputy Commandant, Miss Pratt (transferred from the Q.M.A.A.C.), and two Assistant Commandants, Mrs. Beatty (transferred from the W.R.N.S.) and Miss K. Andrew (transferred from the Q.M.A.A.C.). There were

also six Probationary Officers waiting for vacancies at the Training School to go through their course (*see* pages 36-47), and a considerable number of W.R.A.F. and Civilian Subordinate Clerical Assistants.

Up to this time, W.M.3 had been a sub-section of Colonel Bersey's Department, known as M.3, but when I applied for the information necessary to enable me to start work, such as lists of W.R.A.F. Officers and of Air Force Camps where women were working, I found that there was no accurate information available, and no adequate system for filing or registering letters. I had the greatest difficulty in obtaining from M.3 the names of the Camps where women were employed. I was shown a large map on which were dots representing Air Force Aerodromes, Camps, and landing places, but there was nothing to indicate whether W.R.A.F. were employed at them.

No list of the Hostels where Mobiles* were accommodated in Air Force Camps was forthcoming, and I was even unable to obtain a Roll of the W.R.A.F. Officers. I was given some inaccurate lists, but it was not until nearly three months later (just before my dismissal) that I received a list of Hostels which purported to be complete; but this, also, was incomplete and did not mention several Air Force Camps where large numbers of women were working without any supervision by Women Officers (*see* pages 115, 120-122).

I then found that I was responsible for the women working in over five hundred Air Force Camps, and yet there were only seventy-three Women Officers when I took over, some of them very inexperienced women.

Questions of policy had never been touched upon, and it was impossible to discover any basis of general agreement in the Office as to the correct interpretation of the Regulations governing the W.R.A.F. (F.S. Pub. 14). A large number of urgent cases for discharge had accumulated, apparently because no one could decide whether they should be dealt with on the grounds of misconduct, inefficiency, or compassion, the three

* W.R.A.F. rank and file quartered in Hostels and liable to be employed wherever required.

reasons laid down in the W.R.A.F. Regulations for discharge (*see* F.S. Pub. 14). There were no arrangements for treating the sick, and during the influenza epidemic I had in certain cases to pay for a doctor's attendance on the rank and file out of my own pocket. I found that a great deal of my time was taken up in trying to answer incessant urgent trunk calls on the telephone from all parts of the United Kingdom. It is impossible to describe the state of confusion in an Office where no one seemed to know anything about the Station or Area from which the urgent message came, even though that communication referred to recent correspondence or telegrams of which there appeared to be no trace. As these messages concerned Colonel Bersey's Department, I could only pass them on to him.

Soon after my arrival, I went on a tour round some of the Air Force Camps, to see for myself under what conditions the women were employed, what work was required of them, and what was needed to make the Force efficient. An Assistant Commandant, Miss K. Andrew, accompanied me, and Colonel Bersey sent one of his Staff to gather information for his Department.

Unlike the Q.M.A.A.C. and the W.R.N.S., who were to cease to exist after the war, it had been decided that the W.R.A.F. was to be a permanent corps. The women were not only employed as cooks, waitresses, and clerks, but were engaged on technical work, some of which was highly skilled, such as sail-making, doping, rigging, acetylene welding, fitting, and turning. They were also employed as turnsmiths, sheet metal workers, vulcanisers, coppersmiths, electricians, wireless operators, storekeepers, and in greasing and repairing the aeroplanes. Everywhere I found that the W.R.A.F. took the greatest pride in their particular job. The type of woman enrolled as rank and file was most promising, and they never gave any trouble when satisfied that their work was valued and of national importance.

The conditions in the camps varied—due allowance must be made for the fact that the W.R.A.F. had not grown and expanded gradually, according to the requirements of the Service, as had been the case with the

Q.M.A.A.C. and W.R.N.S. In the case of the W.R.A.F. large bodies of women had been suddenly rushed into the newly formed Air Force Camps to work as cooks, waitresses, and typists. In some instances no preparations —in others very inadequate preparations—had been made by the Air Ministry for their accommodation and welfare, and the utmost confusion prevailed. In certain camps, under efficient Air Force Commanding Officers and experienced Women Officers, everything possible was done for the well-being of the W.R.A.F., and it was satisfactory to see what excellent results could be obtained by means of hard work in good conditions with plenty of healthy recreation, out-door sports, dancing, musical competitions, etc.

In Camps where the conditions were not so favourable, the contrast in the general efficiency and health of the women was very marked. In many of the Air Stations the women employed were Immobiles, *i.e.*, day-workers living at home. Some of them had to come long distances for very early work and were expected to bring their own food. In many cases, the Air Ministry had not made any provision for a Rest-Room or even Shelter where the women could dry their wet clothes and heat up a meal. In these uncomfortable surroundings a great deal of illness prevailed, and it was often the custom to discharge these sick Immobiles, who only needed a little care and attention. In one Camp, where a large number of women were working, the latrines consisted of six uncovered pails in a row, behind a sagging bit of canvas, close to the men's latrines. No earth was provided. I visited the camp on a hot spring day, and, as the pails had evidently not been emptied for some time, their condition may well be imagined.

In several places the women were seriously overworked. In one camp the cooks were in an unventilated kitchen, at a temperature which no white person could long endure. Several cases of fits from heat were reported to me. In some instances, the idea seemed to prevail that the Air Force Authorities should endeavour to get as much work out of the women as possible, as now that they were soldiers and had signed on for the period of the war, they could not complain under penalty of punishment, fines, or dismissal on the grounds of "inefficiency."

Although I avoided appearing to notice anything excepting my own business it was impossible to shut one's eyes to the reckless waste and extravagance which seemed to prevail in certain Air Force Camps. In one case costly aeroplanes seemed to have received as little care and attention as the women. The night before our arrival a large number of newly completed Handley Page machines had landed on their way to France. In spite of the immense value of the machines and urgent need of them at the Front, and although a gale was obviously brewing, it was decided that these machines should be anchored for the night in a most exposed spot at the top of a hill in an open field, so close to each other that disaster would seem inevitable. During the night several of these magnificent flying machines, representing vast sums of public money, were blown on to each other and were reduced to an indescribable mass of twisted and splintered wreckage.

In some of the Air Force Camps the women were quartered in hutments. In spite of the fact that these were newly built, in a large number of cases they were of obsolete pattern—very solid, with concrete floors and defective ventilation. In some instances the kitchen had no ventilation at all, the windows not being made to open. It seemed inconceivable that public money should be wasted in erecting totally unsatisfactory buildings, the solidity of which made it clear that, with the exception of the faulty roofs and windows and doors, they were intended to last for a long period.

I should like to emphasise the fact that wherever I went round Air Force Camps on this tour (with two exceptions—Hurst Park and another), I was invariably received in the friendliest way by the Commanding Officers and other Senior Officers, when they had satisfied themselves that I was working directly under the Master-General of Personnel. On all sides I heard bitter complaints of the high-handed action taken in certain cases, regardless of local needs and conditions. I was assured that letters and urgent questions had received no attention, or, worse still, an order would come which did not fit the case, and which only led to an interminable correspondence.

In some of the Air Force Camps the conditions were very bad. At Hurst Park, the state of dirt and disorder in some of the hostels was indescribable—food, boots, clothing, and hair-combings hidden in the beds—no method or attempt at discipline.

Hurst Park was the Central Depot of the Air Force Motor Transport Section, to which was attached the Training School for five hundred Women Motor Transport Drivers. The O.C. was Temporary Lieut.-Colonel Sam Janson. I did not know until after my dismissal that the Motor Transport was under the control of the Equipment Department (Major-General Brancker). The training course was a somewhat tiring one—it was, therefore, most necessary that the women should be well housed and fed, and that every facility should be given them for rest and recreation. Nothing had been done for their comfort—the lavatories and baths were totally inadequate, and in the dormitories the barest necessities were not provided. The girls had nowhere to hang their heavy wet coats and mackintoshes, and had to spread them to dry on their beds.

I at once took steps through the proper channel to mend matters, little guessing that my requests and instructions, readily agreed to at the time, would be ignored and cancelled behind my back. The fact that I felt obliged to post a more experienced Senior Woman Officer to take charge of the Hostels at the Depot, moving the one I found to a less arduous post, gave great dissatisfaction (*see* page 390).

Already I was becoming more and more acutely aware of the difficulties of running effectively a Department of which I was the nominal Head, while on the other hand three-quarters of the work was under the control of Colonel Bersey's Department—such as recruiting, the posting of women, uniforms, pay, rations, accommodation, etc., over which I had no jurisdiction, though, owing to my holding the title of Commandant, I was liable for the blame in the event of breakdowns. In the case of the Q.M.A.A.C. and the W.R.N.S., the Heads of those Corps were in sole charge, and had no intermediate Department to deal with, they were therefore able to apply direct to

those concerned for all that was necessary to carry on their work.

As under the existing arrangement, Colonel Bersey and his Staff were my only channel of communication with the Air Ministry Departments, and with the Generals and O.C's in the Areas, who were in command of the W.R.A.F. attached to the Air Force Camps, I saw the necessity for the closest co-operation between our two Departments, and this I was determined to do my utmost to attain. What success my efforts met with will be seen later.

The tour convinced me that we were suffering from a serious shortage of Women Officers, and that the conditions in the Air Force Camps could not be improved until I was able to post out a large number of experienced, reliable women, who, I felt convinced, would soon get matters on to a proper footing without fuss or friction. Some of the W.R.A.F. Officers I saw were women of some experience and good ability—others were Junior Officers who had formerly been in the Q.M.A.A.C. or the W.R.N.S., and who, perhaps, may have been allowed to transfer because they were not of sufficient value to their former Corps to necessitate their retention. I made up my mind to promote as quickly as possible Officers who had already some experience of Hostel management and of handling large bodies of women. It was also my intention to train a large number of women, giving them every facility by means of "refresher" courses to qualify for promotion, and I hoped by this means to strengthen up and assist any whose inadequacy was only due to inexperience.

CHAPTER II.

The Things that Mattered.

I returned to the Air Ministry with a fair general idea of the work I should be responsible for if I accepted the post of Commandant, W.R.A.F. The most urgent matters demanding immediate attention were :—

1.—The provision and training of competent Women Officers.

2.—The provision of Uniforms.

3.—The improvement of accommodation :—

(*a*). The provision of suitable accommodation for Women Officers and Rank and File.

(*b*). The provision of Hostels, Huts, Rest-Rooms, and Lavatories, etc.

(*c*). The establishment of Depot Hostels for the temporary accommodation of recruits.

(*d*). The provision of Hospitals for V.D. and urgent Pregnancy Cases.

4.—The setting-up of a Medical Department.

5.—The organisation of H.Q. Office and the training of an efficient Headquarters' Staff.

6.—The revision of the W.R.A.F. Regulations *re* Discipline, Insurance, Pay, and Hours of Work.

Training of Officers.

I at once tried to push forward the training of officers as quickly as possible. Before my arrival, one of Colonel Bersey's Staff Officers, Temporary Major E. H. Cockburn (*see* pages 95, 224), had been in charge of the Training Hostel in Portland Place, where the Air Ministry had secured a most expensively-fitted house, standing at a high rent. It could only accommodate 25 Probationary Officers at a time. Under the Regulations governing the W.R.A.F. every candidate had to fill in an Application

Form (A.M. 5), giving particulars of previous experience and qualifications. They then had to pass a Selection Board and Medical Board, and spend three weeks in training before being eligible for appointment as an officer. The rank of each Probationary Officer and the post for which they were selected depended on the report of their work and qualifications during training.

I was aware that it would be necessary for me to train 800 to 1,000 women officers immediately, as General Paine told me that, in order to release more men, our maximum strength, 35,000 women, would probably shortly have to be raised to 80,000 or 90,000, which would mean, at least, a total of 2,500 officers. I, therefore, told General Paine that the accommodation in the present Training Hostel was quite inadequate, and that I could not undertake to get the W.R.A.F. into working order unless I was allowed facilities for training 180 to 200 women at a time. General Paine agreed and told me to get out a scheme. I did so immediately, and he approved it, but, owing to the difficulties raised by the Air Ministry and the Equipment Department, which Colonel Bersey seemed unable to overcome, I never obtained from the Air Ministry any further accommodation for training Officers (*see* pages 102, 133).

Uniforms.

Another urgent matter was the provision of uniforms, and as the question of W.R.A.F. clothing appears to have led to serious difficulties, I feel obliged to enter into this matter in detail so that it may be judged on its merits. The rank and file had been promised uniforms and a bonus at the end of their month's probation. They had signed their enrolment forms, binding themselves to serve on this understanding for the duration of the war. The women were liable to heavy penalties, fines, and imprisonment, if they broke their part of the contract. They, therefore, felt all the more keenly that it was very unjust that the pledges given by the Air Ministry were not kept. No uniforms had been decided on when I became Commandant, and the women were compelled to work in their own clothes, saturated with grease and oil; even overalls were not provided. Apart from the serious

hardship and expense to the women, the lack of uniforms made it very difficult to maintain discipline. It was obviously impossible to control the going and coming of large numbers of un-uniformed and, therefore, unidentifiable women in and out of the Air Force Camps and Aerodromes, particularly at night. It is well known that uniform is an important factor in stimulating *esprit de corps* and self-respect, especially among women. I was so fully aware of the urgency of this question, that I inspected the Clothing Depot the day I took over and chose the material and pattern uniform the following day.

Though I took every step to ensure that the matter was put through as quickly as possible, at every turn obstacles seemed to arise.

As soon as I chose a pattern, I was informed that it was impossible to procure it. Knowing well that in war-time there were great difficulties in obtaining material, I took the precaution of choosing several samples, numbering them in order of preference. Again and again I was assured by Colonel Bersey's representative, Major E. H. Cockburn, that a certain material could be obtained without fail, but when I decided on it I was told that it was unavailable. Finally (*see* pages 123, 124, 279-281), Colonel Bersey and Major Cockburn informed me that only a particular cloth was at our disposal. It did not seem to me to be either as suitable or durable as other samples, but as there was no alternative I was obliged to accept what I was offered. In spite of every effort on my part, I was unable to procure any uniforms from General Brancker's Department until the end of August, shortly before General Brancker succeeded General Paine and I was dismissed.

With regard to the W.R.A.F. Officers' uniforms, the delay and obstacles were quite as serious and incomprehensible. Soon after I arrived I chose the khaki material for the uniforms and the design. I consulted the W.R.A.F. Headquarters' Staff, Colonel Bersey, and all concerned; they seemed pleased with the pattern selected and with the design of the uniform. Again endless delay arose with regard to the material. When the matter seemed finally arranged I was told by Colonel Bersey that the Air Ministry was considering the question

of putting the men and women officers and rank and file into blue instead of into khaki. He assured me that this matter was strictly confidential and could not be decided for at least three weeks. I was being pressed on all sides to put the Officers and women immediately into uniform. I could only assure the O.C's in the Areas that I was informed that the Air Ministry was doing its utmost to expedite matters. Early in June I was informed that Officers and members were to go into blue instead of into khaki. Again I had the greatest difficulty over the samples of blue cloth; pattern after pattern which I selected was withdrawn, and I began to despair of ever getting the uniforms. It seemed incomprehensible that, while the Q.M.A.A.C. and the W.R.N.S. were properly equipped, the W.R.A.F was held up at every turn. At last a suitable blue cloth was available, and as I had long before designed the style of the uniform, and everybody concerned had expressed their satisfaction with it, no further hitch seemed possible. The Queen was asked by General Paine to see the sample of the W.R.A.F. Officers' and members' uniform, and he instructed me to get some uniforms made and to take some of the Officers and a Section Leader to Buckingham Palace on July 29th, 1918. I did so, but on the same evening, after the uniforms had been approved by the King and Queen, I was informed by Colonel Bersey that a mistake had been made about the blue cloth, that it had proved to be a bad wearing material, and that it would be impossible for me to have the blue uniforms before October next, though I could have the khaki cloth. I then told General Paine that I could not take the responsibility any longer of keeping the women out of uniform. I mentioned the great dissatisfaction which prevailed, as the women felt that the Air Ministry was breaking faith with them, and I asked him to authorise my putting them into khaki immediately. He agreed, and I again attempted to push the matter forward, but there seemed to be as much difficulty about the khaki cloth for Officers' uniforms as there had been about the blue. Reports were widely spread that the delay was caused by my slackness and inefficiency and alleged dislike to uniform. I was often asked on the telephone and otherwise why I objected to uniform being worn, and O.C's in Air Force Camps

complained of the lack of discipline caused by the views attributed to me.

Accommodation.

At the same time, I was endeavouring to improve the women's accommodation. All communications with the Equipment Department went through Colonel Bersey, who invariably seemed to agree with my requests, and I never realised until I was dismissed that my action in declining to take over certain unsuitable and insanitary houses had given offence to the Equipment Department. As I was greatly in need of accommodation, I much regretted the impossibility of making use of these buildings, and the consequent further delays entailed.

In my official capacity as a National Health Insurance Commissioner, it had been one of my duties during the past six years to inspect accommodation. I was, therefore, familiar with the requirements, and I am convinced that I should have failed in my duty to the public if I had consented to house the women in some of the accommodation provided by the Equipment Department.

I must take this opportunity of making clear that I had no wish or intention to urge that the women should be given luxuries, or that the quarters provided in war-time should necessarily be up to the standard of what would be required for permanent ones in times of peace. It seemed to me, however, that good sanitation and consequent good health must in all circumstances be ensured.

I fully realised that we were dealing with an emergency owing to the shortage of housing accommodation; but as other more adaptable buildings were available, I did not feel that unsuitable quarters should be accepted on behalf of the Government at a high rent and premium (and in some cases compensation), and that expensive structural alterations should be made in a fruitless attempt to render them satisfactory.

For instance, I was asked to take over a house in London which was quite unsuitable for a Hostel. It was full of dry rot and almost pitch dark, the ventilation and

sanitary arrangements were very bad, and it was unfit for habitation. It had not been let for some time, yet it had been accepted on behalf of the W.R.A.F. before I became Commandant. It was obviously impossible for me to put any women into it, so I asked Colonel Bersey to have it inspected by a doctor from the Air Force Medical Department to see if he endorsed my opinion. The doctor did so.

Unfortunately, expensive alterations had already been started—new floors were being put in certain rooms, and a modern fitted lavatory had been made in the only coal-hole in such a dark and inaccessible place, that I only discovered it when striking matches in the basement. Unfortunately, I had also to refuse to take over five houses in Queen's Gate which had been accepted from the Equipment Department before I became Commandant. These houses were large and expensive with parquet floors and plate glass windows. The lavatory accommodation throughout was inadequate. The kitchens were so dark and ill-ventilated and small it would have been impossible to cook for large numbers in them. It was intended to use these houses as a Depot Hostel for three hundred recruits for the rank and file of the W.R.A.F., but only one hundred and fifty could be accommodated. Plans for knocking these houses into one had been approved, and the work actually started. This would have meant a large outlay of several thousand pounds, and, in my opinion, the houses would never have been suitable for their purpose, or justified the expenditure, and it would have been almost impossible to maintain discipline in those particular buildings. Again, Colonel Bersey entirely agreed when we discussed the matter, and promised to arrange it with the Equipment Department. Later on, however, I found that my unavoidable action had given further offence to the Department concerned.

Besides the Women Officers, it was necessary to train a large number of the rank and file to post out to the Camps as cooks, waitresses, clerks, technical workers, etc. When I became Commandant, Colonel Bersey told me that it had been decided to accommodate and train about four hundred women cooks, waitresses, clerks, and technical workers at Halton Camp, Wendover, a very large Air

Force Camp. I asked to see the women's quarters there, and visited the Camp with him on May 29th, 1918.

The hutments allocated to the W.R.A.F. were on the slope of the hill; there was no drainage system whatever; the buildings were placed one above the other; everything that was emptied from one hut poured down on to the hut below. In wet weather the latrines washed down on to the huts immediately below them. A steep path which led through the camp became in wet weather a torrent-way, and the water and drainage from the camp flowed down this path and collected on a flat bed of ground at the bottom of it. If women had been quartered there, I am convinced that we should very shortly have had a bad outbreak of illness. Again, Colonel Bersey agreed with me that, at present, the camp was unsuitable as a Training Centre for women, and he promised to report the matter immediately to the Equipment Department (*see* pages 265, 266).

Owing to the failure of accommodation at Halton Camp, it was necessary at once to think out a scheme which would house the women elsewhere during their time of training. To avoid delay, I went that same afternoon to see Sir Robert Blair, Education Officer of the London County Council, of which body I had formerly been a co-opted member. I asked him whether he could tell me of any suitable building which would form a nucleus for a training school. Sir Robert Blair happened to know that "Berridge House," at West Hampstead, the National Society's Domestic Economy Training Centre, was available, as the students were all engaged on war work. I got in touch with the Secretary of the Society that afternoon, and arranged to visit the building late that same evening. On inspecting the premises I found them most suitable for a training centre. "Berridge House" had been specially built for that purpose, and included six fully-equipped kitchens with up-to-date ranges, gas stoves, and hot plates, etc., two laundry centres, class rooms, and laboratories, students' sleeping accommodation; everything complete. I told Colonel Bersey about it, and I asked him to visit it with me, so that he might inform the Equipment Department that it was available and ask them if they could secure it. Colonel Bersey accordingly came to see it with me the

next day, said that he was delighted with the accommodation, and he promised to get the matter arranged as quickly as possible. I reported the matter to General Paine, who fully approved. The Equipment Department apparently raised difficulties as for some time Colonel Bersey said he was unable to give me any information as to whether we might have "Berridge House" or not. The Secretary of the National Society, who had given us the refusal, 'phoned to me repeatedly to ask whether the Air Ministry wished to take over the building, as other Government Departments were anxious to secure it. After further delay, Colonel Bersey told me that he understood that the Medical Department of the Air Ministry had already taken the building over, with a view to turning it into a Hospital. It seemed incredible that money should be wasted in converting fully-equipped kitchens into hospital wards, when a Cookery Training Centre was so urgently needed, and I begged Colonel Bersey to urge that the matter should be reconsidered by the Equipment Department, as General Paine was pressing me to get the training scheme started. I was relieved to hear from one of the Air Force Senior Doctors, in the course of other business, that his Department had never heard of this building, and had no intention of taking it over.

Hearing that the expensive alterations to the five unsuitable houses in Queen's Gate were being proceeded with, I visited them on June 11th with one of Colonel Bersey's Staff, Captain J. P. Cherry, and he agreed with me that it would be impossible to turn them into a satisfactory Depot Hostel for three hundred Mobile rank and file. I then took this Officer to "Berridge House," West Hampstead, and told him that if we were allowed to have it, and if I could be certain of obtaining sufficient accommodation to house 1,200 women near it, I proposed to group the Depot Hostel and the Probationary Officers' Training Hostel there, in order to have one comprehensive scheme for training, not only rank and file, but Officers, and thus economise in the feeding arrangements and the necessary domestic staff, and form a Training Centre to accommodate 200 cooks, 200 waitresses, 180 typists and clerks, 150 Officers, a Depot Hostel for 300 women, the necessary permanent

and instructional staffs, a Club House with recreation rooms for Officers and rank and file. All could be catered for by the W.R.A.F. in training at the Cookery School, and the whole scheme would be comprised in a more or less self-contained colony, within convenient distance of the Instructional School.

If the Queen's Gate scheme had been persisted in, the Air Ministry would have had to take at least five more houses in or near the existing Training Centre for Officers in Portland Place, which only accommodated twenty-five, at rents of approximately £500 each—not including rates and taxes and possible premiums. In order to avoid delay and misunderstanding, I felt it necessary to make certain that the houses required were available before putting forward my scheme. Accompanied by Colonel Bersey's representative, Captain Cherry, I, therefore, got into touch the next day with the local house agent and we personally inspected about twenty-five houses in the neighbourhood of "Berridge House," and, before dark, I was able to satisfy myself that, in the event of the Equipment Department agreeing to recommend these premises, we should be able to house without much difficulty 1,200 to 1,300 people in suitable accommodation, at a moderate rental—total about £5,000.

I asked Colonel Bersey whether the necessary equipment was available, and on his assuring me that it was all right, and that I could have it at once, I wrote a Report and submitted it to General Paine. He approved it, and told me to get the scheme into running order immediately. If the furniture and equipment had been forthcoming, I could have started the Training Centre so urgently needed, in a fortnight's time, as he instructed me to do; but owing to the delays caused by the Housing and Equipment Department, I was unable to obtain the use of the premises up to the date of my dismissal (August 28th, 1918), though they were standing empty for many weeks.

My successor arrived in time to take over these premises, as I had completed the arrangements for opening the Training Course there on receiving the equipment during the few days I remained at the Office after my dismissal (*see* page 173).

Medical Department.

When I asked how it was that there were no arrangements for treating the sick, Colonel Bersey informed me that he was starting a Medical Section at the W.R.A.F. H.Q., which was to comprise a Staff of Doctors and Nurses under his control attached to the W.R.A.F. H.Q. This seemed to me to be a doubtful arrangement, as in order to ensure an efficient medical service, it would necessarily have to be under the authority of professional experts, and neither Colonel Bersey nor I were competent to advise in these matters.

As the Air Force had already got its medical service, I was, rightly or wrongly, of opinion that Doctors and Nurses for attendance on the W.R.A.F. should be part of and under the control of the head of the Department of the Director-General Medical Services (Major-General Munday).

Soon after my return from tour, General Munday, to my great relief, sent to tell me that he was setting up immediately a scheme for medical treatment of the W.R.A.F. After several conferences, arrangements were made, Dr. Letitia Fairfield was appointed to organise the new Department, and she took up her duties on July 1st, 1918.

Dr. Fairfield asked me shortly after her arrival to provide hospitals for V.D. and urgent cases of pregnancy. She told me that she would have to have four Hospitals in different parts of the country. I at once secured a house near London to start with, and was negotiating for another in the Midland Area, when I was dismissed.

CHAPTER III.

Mason's Yard.

My repeated requests for correspondence and files referred to in urgent trunk calls, and for general information, had convinced Colonel Bersey that some sort of system of filing letters and papers was advisable. He asked me whether I could secure for him from another Government Department the help of an expert in Registry work. Wishing to assist him, I made his request known in various Offices, and the Welsh Insurance Commission kindly consented to lend the services of an experienced officer. It was arranged that he should come for a fortnight—renewable if necessary—but that the arrangement should be on a purely temporary basis.

Later on I found that I was credited with having smuggled this officer into the Office in order to secure for him a safe berth out of the Trenches, and that I had appointed him Deputy Commandant. Mr. Tyson Wilson, M.P. (who obviously did not know the facts), was induced to ask a question in the House of Commons on this absurd point (*see* pages 88, 89).

I had no idea at the time that the starting of an effective Registry was the cause of great dissatisfaction to certain men and women Officers on the H.Q. Staff. Up to date they had been able to conduct all correspondence on private lines and appoint anyone they chose to posts. Under the Registry system, this was impossible, as all correspondence had to be registered, filed, and marked to its appropriate section for action, approval, or reference.

My month's look round had nearly expired. I had become aware that it would be impossible to attempt to organise the office on the lines of dual control laid down by the Air Ministry, unless I had the necessary co-operation of M.3 Department. I had tried, by every means in my power, to obtain that co-operation, and the facilities required to carry on my work; but it was clear that I could not rely on receiving them.

I had done my utmost to prevent Colonel Bersey feeling that I had been appointed to supersede him. I was aware that the situation was a delicate one, and I treated him throughout with the courtesy and cordiality of a colleague—consulting him and keeping him in touch with everything in W.M.3, and assuming that he was anxious to help on the work to the best of his ability.

Some of the difficulties I was able to put down to the pressure of war work and to certain officers' lack of experience of administration and office organisation ; but it was impossible to shut one's eyes to the fact that we did not seem able to procure the facilities necessary to enable the W.R.A.F. to succeed.

During the first weeks the W.R.A.F. H.Q. was at the Hotel Cecil. My room—a tiny attic in the top of a pinnacle—was very dark and inconveniently situated in a narrow passage and was next door to the men's lavatory. The window opened level with the floor, and had to be kept closed to prevent disarrangement of papers and files, which for lack of furniture I was obliged to keep on the floor.

My work was greatly hampered by the fact that for some incomprehensible reason the W.R.A.F. appeared to be taboo in the Air Ministry. I was not able to obtain the barest necessaries—the Air Ministry only supplied me with a small barrack table, two kitchen chairs, an ink pot, and six paper clips. Though there was a large supply of furniture available at the Office of Works, Sir A. Mond's representative at the Air Ministry assured me that I was not entitled to a writing table, and it was only when I suggested that to save trouble I would apply personally to Sir A. Mond that I was able to procure a table with some drawers. I was most anxious to avoid difficulties and expense in War time, but it was impossible to work without certain indispensable Office Equipment. It was only through the kind efforts of Officials in other Government Departments that I was able to obtain the loan of necessaries, and could put away in security the large number of confidential papers for which I was held responsible.

I was not allowed the services of a clerk, though I made repeated personal requests for one, and had to be

personally responsible for secretarial help up to a week before my dismissal. Colonel Bersey, on the other hand, had a large Staff of Air Force Officers and civilian clerks and every facility for carrying on his work.

To those who are not familiar with the enormous departmental machinery set up during war-time by the new Government Departments, it will be difficult to realise or even imagine the vast ramifications of the Air Ministry. The Civilian or "Secretarial" side was sub-divided into sections and sub-sections—each under numerous Senior Officers, Secretaries, and Assistant Secretaries, with an army of civilian clerks, personal assistants, typists, telephonists, watchmen, and girl messengers in attendance. The Military or Air Force side was even more complicated, and had a large number of Temporary Officers attached to it.

The headquarters of both the Secretarial and Air Force Departments were at the Hotel Cecil. To obtain the simplest necessity, a series of steps had to be taken, and interminable correspondence entered into which was out of all proportion to the small matter involved.

During the whole time I was Commandant, I failed, in spite of repeated requests, to obtain an Air Ministry pass, to which every official and officer was entitled. Though my work took me constantly in and out of the building, I was often held up at the entrance, and forced to wait —owing to the necessarily strict regulations—until I had filled in a Form, stating my business, and in spite of explanations, I was often solemnly escorted to my own door by a girl messenger, presumably to call on myself. These and other minor obstructions are indications of the manner in which I was hampered in carrying out my work. Much waste of time would have been prevented had I been able to rely on the constant promises and assurances given me.

A few weeks later Brig.-General Guy Livingston arranged for the removal of the W.R.A.F. H.Q. to Mason's Yard, a mews off Piccadilly, where we were located in the back premises of an hotel, the main building of which—still occupied as an hotel—fronted on to Jermyn Street. The wing occupied by W.R.A.F. H.Q. had just been

vacated by the Air Force Training Department, of which General Livingston was in charge.

The entrance was next door to a public-house, and was the backdoor of the hotel. The surroundings were most unsuitable for the Headquarters of a Women's Corps. Visitors, who came in large numbers to make enquiries, complained of the undesirable situation, which contrasted very unfavourably with the accommodation provided for the Q.M.A.A.C. and W.R.N.S. in private houses (Grosvenor Street and Great Stanhope Street). The whole of the buildings at Headquarters, W.R.A.F., was occupied by Colonel Bersey and his Staff, with the exception of five small rooms on the top floor where my Staff and I were accommodated. Shortly before my dismissal, I was informed by Colonel Bersey that orders had been received that the Commandant and her Staff were to take over his rooms and those of his personal Staff. I assured him that I did not wish to inconvenience him in any way, but he told me that he was moving into another part of the building. Though I had never complained, as it was war time, of the accommodation given me by the Air Ministry, I may be allowed to point out that up to this time it was highly unsuitable and gave business visitors a very wrong impression of the status and responsibilities of the W.R.A.F. Commandant.

The main building of the hotel was just opposite our windows, but separated by a courtyard. Iron outside staircases led out of each floor of the hotel straight across the yard into the W.R.A.F. Headquarters, from which there was also access into an Air Force Station in Duke Street as well as into the Power Station. There was nothing to prevent hotel visitors coming into the office through the French windows in Colonel Bersey's Department if they wished to do so. During the first few days no arrangement was made for a night porter to be on duty, and the building was left unguarded, and during the whole time I was Commandant, certain rooms opening directly into Colonel Bersey's office were reserved by the hotel proprietors and frequently occupied

by a client. However much above suspicion the occupier of the rooms may have been, this arrangement necessitated strangers coming in and out from the hotel to "do" his rooms. It must be remembered that much valuable information—lists of Air Force Stations, confidential maps, and secret landing-places, as well as the record of the full strength and personnel of the Royal Air Force, were kept in the office.

In spite of the strict injunctions received by all Heads of Departments to safeguard secret maps and documents on account of their value to the enemy, no sort of precaution was taken in the early days at W.R.A.F. Headquarters.

To those who were aware of the occasional mysterious disappearance during the war of reports and the leakage of secret plans, it will seem incredible that such slackness and negligence was permitted. In addition to the possibility of losing confidential papers, the fact that the wires of a main telegraph and telephone junction were grouped and fixed on to a telegraph pole within easy reach of the upper windows, at W.R.A.F. Headquarters, added to the grave risks incurred.

I was assured that all was well as General Livingston and the Equipment Department were responsible for these arrangements with the Hotel Authorities. Feeling that I could not be in any way a party to such lack of ordinary precaution, I did everything possible to safeguard the rooms I was concerned with, and I asked Colonel Bersey to take the necessary steps to secure a night-watchman. Shortly afterwards an old soldier was posted at night at the front entrance; but nothing was done effectively to prevent the iron staircases being used which led into the hotel, or to prevent the civilian stranger from sleeping in the office.

Among the serious obstacles which delayed my work was the great difficulty of getting about from place to place to keep the urgent appointments awaiting me. When I was obliged to ask M.3 Department to order a car from the Transport Section of the Equipment Department, it so constantly failed to arrive in time, that,

later on, I had to beg General Paine to take steps to ensure my having reliable transport. He gave instructions that a car was to be always available. This, however, did not end my difficulties, as the Ford cars allocated to me by Lieut.-Colonel Janson, O.C., Hurst Park Motor Transport Depôt, were constantly so out of repair that they were useless, and during the few weeks I was Commandant I spent over £50 out of my own pocket in taxis, in the endeavour to keep appointments and carry out my duties.

It did not reflect credit on the efficiency of the Air Force Motor Transport Section, or seem fitting that the Commandant, W.R.A.F., in spite of repeated requests, should be sent about in a broken-down, badly-turned-out car, with a tattered hood so full of holes that it was useless to put it up during the heavy rains.

That there was no difficulty in providing transport is shown by the fact that Junior Air Force Officers were constantly seen driving about in Crossleys and other luxurious and expensive cars.

I did not want to make any trouble—least of all, in war-time—about anything that concerned my personal comfort, but it will be understood how greatly my heavy work was hampered by these unnecessary difficulties.

In ordinary times, it would have been a simple matter to put a stop to these obstructions; but it must be remembered that we were at the worst crisis of the war. General Paine, as Master-General of Personnel for the whole Air Force, had an overwhelming task. During my short and hurried interviews with him, I had often over fifty urgent matters requiring his immediate sanction and decision.

Though I was held responsible for any delay, I could only hope to put through a few of the most vital matters before he was called away to an emergency conference or an overseas trunk-call. It was unthinkable that anyone should attempt to take up his time with anything which merely concerned personal comfort and convenience.

Some of the W.R.A.F. and Junior Women Members of the Civilian Staff had influential friends at the Air Ministry, who fetched them from the Office and gave

them the use of their Government cars at night. This tended to increase the difficulties, as it caused jealousy and friction and neglect of work.

Colonel Bersey's clerical staff was composed of Civilian Subordinates and W.R.A.F. rank and file. The former received much higher pay than the W.R.A.F. and were, apparently, free from any control. The W.R.A.F. clerks, often working in the same room as the Civilian Subordinates, were, in office hours, under the orders of the particular Air Force Junior Officer to whose room they happened to be allocated, and as they were Immobiles, *i.e.*, living either at home or in lodgings, they came under slight supervision (*see* pages 173-174).

Very little discrimination seems to have been used by the Air Ministry in selecting certain women for office work; some of these ought never to have been taken into the Government Service. There were, of course, valuable exceptions, who did the bulk of the work. There is evidence to show that, among a number, however, a thoroughly bad tone prevailed. Language and personal habits were indulged in, of a character which could only be described as disgusting, and which would not be tolerated among people who had the faintest claim to be considered respectable.

Soon after I arrived, when working late, I was obliged to speak to three women civilian clerks, who were attracting attention by indulging in most undesirable hysterical horse-play *en deshabille*, late at night in the dark at the Air Ministry, long after they were supposed to have left. In view of their behaviour I told them that I should immediately report them if anything of the sort occurred again. I had, however, no jurisdiction over the Civilian Subordinates — typists, clerks, messengers — attached to W.R.A.F. Headquarters, as they were under Colonel Bersey; but this fact was not generally realised, and I found myself held responsible, by visitors calling at Headquarters, for the discourtesy and obvious lack of discipline on the part of some, as well as for the breakdowns and mistakes that constantly occurred. These latter were mainly due to the slackness and incompetency

of some of the Air Force Temporary Officers, on whose work we were entirely dependent.

Complaints reached me of the irresponsible way in which telephone messages and enquiries were answered. One O.C. complained later that when he sent a trunk-call to request that a number of women motor-drivers should be sent for duty to his Station, he was asked: "What sort do you want? Front-row Chorus or Ladies of Title —we stock them all—take your choice." As the O.C. in question did not know anyone at W.R.A.F. Headquarters, he was much annoyed at the off-hand answer and the bad taste it indicated.

An undesirable type of woman often invaded the office and tried, by every means, to get a personal interview with me. Unfortunately, the waiting-room at Headquarters adjoined my room and the lift; it was, therefore, sometimes difficult to escape from these importunate candidates for posts, who freely used the names of their alleged friends at the Air Ministry to thrust their demands upon me.

One of these claimants, dressed, and made up apparently to represent a pierrot, informed me that she intended to become an Officer in the W.R.A.F., as she had been promised an appointment on the Headquarters Staff by an influential friend. These women all made clear that they must have senior appointments at W.R.A.F. Headquarters, and that they did not mean to allow themselves to be posted out of reach of their friends in London.

On the other hand, I received all possible help and co-operation from those in the office who had the interests of their work at heart, and of these I cannot speak highly enough. If only they had been in the majority and I had been allowed to train reliable officers, the difficulties would have quickly ceased.

CHAPTER IV.

Why I Accepted the Post.

As my month's "look round" was nearly over, I told Colonel Bersey that I did not want him to think that anything I should feel obliged to report about my own difficulties was intended to reflect on his Department. I, therefore, suggested that he and I should draw up a joint scheme for office organisation. I did this, as I had made up my mind not to accept the post of Commandant, and I was anxious, in view of the war, to do everything in my power to help to get the W.R.A.F. on to a good foundation, and to leave a workable scheme for my successor and Colonel Bersey to start on.

As I have already explained, I was not sure whether Colonel Bersey was withholding the necessary help and information or was unable to provide it. I told General Paine about the suggested office scheme, and that I felt sure that with goodwill it would soon place the W.R.A.F. organisation on sound lines. He instructed us to show it to him the next day. While Colonel Bersey and I were drawing it up that evening, Brigadier-General Livingston came in. This was the first time I had seen him, though I had constantly asked Colonel Bersey to introduce me to his Senior Officers, and also to his Staff in M.3. General Livingston asked what we were doing, and took Colonel Bersey aside. He then left the room. Colonel Bersey, who up to that moment had appeared to be in robust health, then told me that he felt too ill to finish the scheme, and he left the office.

When I reached General Paine's room the next morning he wished to see the scheme, but as it was not ready, I could only make excuses that Colonel Bersey was ill, and that he had not turned up at the office. General Paine sent for General Livingston, and told him he was not satisfied that things were going well in M.3 (Colonel Bersey's Department), but that he knew that I was doing my best to co-operate.

After General Paine left the room, I had a few minutes' talk with General Livingston, who appeared to be greatly annoyed. I assured him that he could rely on me to do everything in my power to help, but he told me in the most abrupt and significant way, that unless I worked under him and Colonel Bersey's Department, the W.R.A.F. could not succeed, "it will break down." As the Air Council had decided that the Commandant was to work directly under the Master-General of Personnel (General Paine), on the same footing as the Heads of the Q.M.A.A.C. and the W.R.N.S., and as she had been given the rank equivalent to Brigadier-General, there could, under Service rules, be no question of working under an Officer holding the same grade, and it never arose.

In his evidence, before the House of Lords Inquiry, General Livingston, in explanation of his warning that "the W.R.A.F. would break down," stated that he was merely pointing out to me that posting of the women personnel must be worked in conjunction with his Department of Manning, as unless he knew where I was posting women, the organisation of the Air Force would break down. General Livingston declared that he was not alluding to a breakdown of the W.R.A.F., but of the Air Force, and he added in his evidence, "I said that she must do her posting through the Department of Manning."

Posting was never mentioned in my short interview with General Livingston—there was no need for it. General Livingston must have been aware, as he was responsible for Colonel Bersey's Department, that posting never was part of my duties, nor was there ever any question raised that it should be. Colonel Bersey was entirely responsible for it under the Department of Manning, of which General Livingston was Head, and this, Colonel Bersey admitted, was the case in his evidence before the House of Lords Inquiry.

"Mr. Hawke: Now, shortly after she came there, did it result in this sort of thing. Mistakes were made about posting women—the rank and file?

"Colonel Bersey: Yes.

"Mr. Hawke: Women sent to camps, and through lack of organisation, no preparation for them?

"Colonel Bersey: It may have happened.

"Mr. Hawke: All the blame of that came on Miss Douglas-Pennant, did it not? People from the camps ringing up the Commandant?

"Colonel Bersey: It might have in some cases.

"Mr. Hawke: It was not anything to do with her department?

"Colonel Bersey: How do you mean?

"Mr. Hawke: The posting women to camps or finding rations for them?

"Colonel Bersey: **No, I think M.3 did the posting of the rank and file.**

.....

"Chairman: This is all quite familiar to us.

"Mr. Hawke: I can only say I am doing my best. I am sorry it is not better."

My only connection with posting was that I had occasionally to ask Colonel Bersey to ensure that we were informed when he was about to send drafts of rank and file to Hostels in Air Force Camps, as women had arrived unexpectedly when no rations or quarters were available, and I, as Commandant, had been held responsible for these breakdowns (*see* pages 132-133).

General Livingston's emphatic remark—that the W.R.A.F. could not succeed unless I worked under him and Colonel Bersey, as the Chief Superintendent (my predecessor) had done could therefore have no reference to "posting."

My month's experience had convinced me that under the existing circumstances it would be impossible to do my duty to the women who were nominally under my charge; but who, in reality, were at the mercy of any irresponsible Junior Officer on Colonel Bersey's Staff. All correspondence went, in the first instance, to Colonel Bersey, and he passed it on for action to whomsoever he thought fit.

It must be remembered that at this time there was no Medical Department, and the most delicate questions and personal interviews concerning the women's health, such as suspected pregnancy or V.D. were often referred to and dealt with in the most casual way by these Junior Air Force Officers, who ought never to have been consulted on these matters.

After carefully considering matters, I came to the conclusion that the position was too unsatisfactory to justify me in leaving my work as a National Health Insurance Commissioner. I therefore wrote on June 11th to General Paine declining the appointment. He was away at the time. I saw him on his return (June 13th), and he strongly urged me to reconsider my decision.

I told him about the shortage of Officers, the bad conditions in certain Camps, and the lack of Office Organisation, and that I did not feel that it would be possible to pull the Corps round, as General Livingston had expressed such decided views that it would break down, unless I worked under him and Colonel Bersey.

It was impossible to shut one's eyes to the fact that my determination to maintain ordinary efficiency and discipline was meeting with obstruction. I told General Paine that it did not seem to me to be right to give up my work in war-time as an Insurance Commissioner, unless the new work required of me could be satisfactorily accomplished.

General Paine urged me to accept the post of Commandant and told me that it was my duty in war-time to do so. He impressed upon me that I was to work directly under him and he promised that I should be given every facility. I undertook to think the matter over, and to give my reply in twenty-four hours. Before arriving at my decision, I made careful enquiries as to my liabilities.

I particularly asked whether I ought to sign any form or register if I accepted the appointment. I was assured that in the case of the Commandant, especially someone who had been for many years in the Government Service, it was quite unnecessary to do so, as the Application Form (A.M.5) was merely to ensure that the applicant for the post of Officer was of British birth and had certain necessary qualifications. It was also pointed out to me that I was not an applicant for the post as I had been selected for the appointment by the Air Council. I ascertained from General Paine's Secretary, that from the time I accepted the post of Commandant, I should be unable under the Regulations governing the W.R.A.F. to resign without permission, and that I should be obliged to

remain in the Service, at any rate for a year, or until the end of the war, whichever was the longer period. These Regulations laid down that:—

> "Your services may be terminated forthwith on the grounds of misconduct or breach of conditions, on receipt of notice given by the Air Council, or that in the event of your services being no longer required, they may be terminated by one month's notice in writing being given you."

General Paine wrote the same day to tell me that he had seen General Livingston and made the position of the W.R.A.F. Commandant quite clear to him, and that he believed I should get all necessary help in the future from Colonel Bersey's Department. General Paine again urged me to become Commandant.

Very reluctantly, I agreed to accept the post, for the sole reason that I did not feel that I could shirk such an unpleasant task in war-time, and that it was my obvious duty, at any cost, to try to get the conditions right for the women who had come forward so wholeheartedly to "do their bit," and who had been grievously neglected.

I gave up a very responsible and arduous post—that of National Health Insurance Commissioner (Wales) with a salary of £1,000 a year, simply and solely in order to try to get the W.R.A.F. on to a right footing and ensure the welfare of the women.

For years I had been working in other Government Departments, and on public and private Committees, with all sorts and conditions of men and women. I have spent a great deal of my time with the young—especially with working boys and girls, and I felt confident that if I were allowed to come into personal touch, I should receive from them and my colleagues the same splendid confidence and co-operation which I had always enjoyed.

As already mentioned, the W.R.A.F. (unlike the Q.M.A.A.C. and the W.R.N.S. who were only enrolled for the period of the war) was to be a permanent Corps. The importance of placing it on a sound foundation was therefore vital. Consideration had to be given to the fact that conditions which temporarily prevailed in war-time would vary greatly in times of peace, and that the building up of the Force must be on elastic lines, to allow for future developments.

As I had been brought up among people in the Services, and had been the first to suggest the formation of the Women's Official Forces, I was convinced that a well-run Corps under good discipline was a fine training-ground for women. It would teach them to lead a life of independence and give and take, it would enable them to learn to work with efficiency and promptitude, to share each other's duties and responsibilities as well as recreation, and last, but not least, to live peaceably together, developing a sense of fair play, honour, and *esprit de corps*.

On June 14th, 1918, I wrote to General Paine, accepting the appointment of Commandant, W.R.A.F. He replied on June 15th. expressing his pleasure that I had consented to do so, and assuring me that he felt "confident that you will make a great success of the W.R.A.F."

From the numerous letters I received from former colleagues and fellow-workers, as well as from boys' and girls' clubs. I felt confident that I had the good wishes of all who realised my reasons for undertaking the work.

I took up my duties as Commandant, W.R.A.F., on June 18th, 1918.

In an interview with Colonel Bersey and myself, General Paine told Colonel Bersey that the Regulations governing the W.R.A.F. (F.S. Publication 14) were immediately to be amended and reissued by July 1st, as they were misleading and did not state the Air Council's decision to appoint a Commandant.* In the existing edition, the W.R.A.F. was described as under the control of M.3, with the Chief Superintendent working under Colonel Bersey's Department, and it contained no mention of a Commandant. It had been issued to all G.O.C.'s and O.C.'s, and I had up to date found myself when carrying out my duties in the awkward predicament of seeming to usurp authority, to which, apparently, from the existing edition of the Regulations, I was not entitled. As I have already mentioned, all callers on matters concerning the W.R.A.F., and even W.R.A.F. Officers, continued to apply by letter or visit to Colonel Bersey's Department,

* The Air Council had sanctioned the appointment of a Commandant in April, 1918, shortly before I was offered the post.

and some Air Force Junior Officers were under the impression that they were my Seniors, and resented my taking action without their permission.

In spite of General Paine's instructions, the amended edition of F.S. Pub. 14 was never published until my dismissal, and the reason for this delay, for which I was blamed, did not transpire until many months later (*see* pages 289-290).

A few days before I accepted the post of Commandant, Lady Mackworth (afterwards Lady Rhondda) forwarded to me a letter which Mrs. Henry Fawcett, Chairman of the Women's Service Bureau (London Suffrage Society), had written to her, complaining of the conditions under which the women were working at the Air Force Stores Depot, Regent's Park, controlled by the Equipment Department.

I visited the Depot the same afternoon, and saw the O.C., who was most anxious to help in every possible way; but had been greatly handicapped for lack of accommodation and equipment, though he had sent in plans for rest-rooms and extra lavatories. I paid several visits to this Depot, and the Officer commanding did everything possible, by means of temporary arrangements, to make the women comfortable.

In spite of the fact that Mrs. Fawcett's complaint was dated before I took over, she wrote to me after I was dismissed, saying that she did not consider me the right person to be Commandant, as I, the responsible person, ought to have amended the state of affairs at the Regent's Park Depot, or resigned if unable to do so. In reply, I told Mrs. Fawcett, who was a total stranger to me, that I had resigned twice as a protest against the obstruction I had met with in my endeavours to improve the conditions under which the women were working in Air Force Camps.

I had no idea until long after my dismissal that the Association of which Mrs. Fawcett was Chairman had sent such a serious statement to Lady Rhondda on information received from Mrs. Beatty that I was instantly dismissed from the Service by Lord Weir, to whom it was repeated by Sir A. Geddes, who was a near relative to Mrs. Fawcett (*see* pages 366-367, 385).

The Regent's Park Depot, however, became a bright spot in my memory, owing to the warmheartedness and

fine spirit of the girls working there. Four days after I became Commandant (June 22nd, 1918), the O.C. phoned to tell me that two women had gone on strike, and that 1,600 other W.R.A.F. threatened to go out on the following Monday. I went up at once to the Depot, and had a talk with the two women. They were most reasonable, and explained that they were striking as a protest against their treatment by the Air Ministry. They had signed on, fully realising that they had pledged themselves thereby to obey all orders and not to obstruct the work. The Air Ministry, on the other hand, had promised them uniforms and a bonus as well as pay. The girls complained that neither the uniforms nor bonus had been received, and that, apart from the ruination of their clothes, their treatment was unjust. They were obliged to provide overalls at their own expense; these quickly became saturated with grease and oil. They said they had spent the previous Sunday trying to boil the grease out before wearing them. In spite of this, they were fined on Monday morning for their untidy appearance.

After a few minutes' talk, the girls went back to work over the week-end, and they assured me that if I would come and speak to all the women on the following Monday, they, as the original leaders, would guarantee that the strike would not take place.

I accordingly went up again to the Depot on Monday, and heard the women's complaints. We discussed the difficulties on the friendliest terms at an open-air meeting, and I can only say that the girls, who were a fine lot, were soon cheering and laughing. They all went back to work, and promised, unasked, never to strike without first discussing the matter with me, as now that we had made acquaintance they felt sure that I would try to remedy all legitimate grievances.

On my return to Headquarters, I took every possible step to try to get matters righted, and the O.C. of the Depot did his utmost to support my efforts.

I left the meeting quite satisfied that the W.R.A.F. at that Depot would be thoroughly loyal to their work and officers, and they never gave me any further trouble though they did not obtain the promised uniforms until September.

Part II.—Ten Weeks in the W.R.A.F.

June 18th, 1918—August 28th, 1918.

CHAPTER V.

Disappointed Candidates.

On June 20th, Colonel Bersey told me that five ladies—Mrs. Lawrence, Mrs. Livingston Parry, Mrs. Glenleigh Taylor, Miss V. M. Leonard, and Miss G. Taylor had been definitely promised certain high posts as officers before I became Commandant. For some weeks they had been working under him as Civilian Subordinates, waiting for vacancies in the Officers' Training Course, which had just started. Four of these candidates had been promised the post of Area Inspector, and one the post of Superintendent of Inspectors.

Area Inspectors would have under their charge all the Hostels in which the women were quartered, and would have to advise in any difficulty or emergency the Hostel Administrators and Technical Superintendents of W.R.A.F. working in the Area, and they would be the Liaison Officers between the G.O.C. of the Area and the Commandant W.R.A.F. at H.Q. An Area was a large district, comprising several counties, and, in some cases, it contained more than 50 Camps and Aerodromes and Stations where women were employed. The Commandant would have to rely entirely on the reports she received from the Area Inspectors.

It was most necessary, for the credit of the Corps, that the Area Inspectors should be women of tact and discretion, ability and experience, who would put the welfare of the women under them first, and their own convenience and comfort last, and it was obvious that these responsible posts could only be held by women possessing these qualifications.

The post of Area Superintendent was even more arduous and responsible, as the Officer holding it had to inspect and report on the work of the Area Inspectors.

When Colonel Bersey mentioned this matter to me, four of the candidates had just been through their

training course. It was against the Regulations to promise any particular post until the Probationary Officer had shown, during her training, what her qualifications were. Colonel Bersey begged me to recommend the five ladies to Sir Godfrey Paine, so that their appointments might go through. I was amazed when I heard that Colonel Bersey had already promised such responsible posts to these five women, none of whom to me, at all events, appeared to have the necessary qualifications.

One of them told me that she was a trained nurse; it turned out that she had been for a few weeks in a Hospital, and during the war had worked as a V.A.D. Another's claim to an Inspectorship was that she had attended the lectures and had passed the 1st Examination of St. John's Ambulance First Aid. This lady seemed to be of a somewhat nervous and excitable temperament, and she came to me during her training to beg me to let her off the examination which all Probationary Officers were required to pass. It was a simple one, but she told me that her nerve specialist said that if she attempted it, it would lead to a serious nervous breakdown. She assured me that certain Generals, who were friends of hers, had said that it was very unfair and unkind of me to make her go through it, as she was a remarkable woman of action. The fact that she had influential friends at the Air Ministry seemed to satisfy her that she was entitled to appointment, and she was greatly upset when I explained that she must take her chance with the rest. I offered the alternative of a *viva voce* examination if she preferred—this she declined, so I did everything possible to console and encourage her to face the ordinary examination. I pointed out that it would be impossible to make an exception in her case, as it would be unfair to others, and contrary to the Regulations. This lady eventually passed the examination, but as she complained bitterly of my unkindness in making her go through it, I did not feel that she was likely to have much sense of justice in dealing with the officers and rank and file under her.

I had some opportunity of testing the qualifications of these two candidates, as I agreed, at Miss Pratt's request, to their being sent to inspect and report on some Hostel

accommodation. I was surprised to find that they had no idea of what was required. As one admitted, before starting, that she did not in the least know what to do, I did my best to help her by putting down exactly what she should look out for when inspecting premises. The other's report was so vague that she was unable to state how many W.R.A.F. the building would accommodate, and she omitted most of the relevant details, such as the number of rooms, lavatories, etc. Her report was such a bad bit of work that I told her that if she liked to try to write a better one after I had explained fully what was required, I would cancel the first to save her feelings, as if it remained on the file for office circulation, I should be obliged to comment adversely on it. It appeared, however, that the ladies or their friends took great offence and resented the fact that I considered it necessary that those holding responsible posts should be capable of doing their work (*see* pages 329-330).

Another of the five ladies, Miss Leonard, had worked at W.R.A.F. H.Q. under Colonel Bersey since February, 1918. She would have made a useful Officer on the clerical side, with training and experience; but was not in my judgment suitable for the responsible post of Superintendent of Area Inspectors which Colonel Bersey had promised her before she had been through her training. She wrote numerous letters complaining that I had refused to fulfil the "engagement" made by Colonel Bersey or "to ratify appointments arranged" before I came, and she sent a statement to that effect to the Press. In this statement she says that "she took charge of the organisation of his Office at W.R.A.F. H.Q., but, in April, 1918, she came to the conclusion that this work was accomplished, and that it was a waste of her ability and experience to remain." Colonel Bersey then, Miss Leonard states, promised her that if she joined the W.R.A.F. he would give her the appointment of Area Superintendent, *i.e.*, Head of the W.R.A.F. Area Inspectors (*see* pages 44-45).

Another candidate was Mrs. Livingston Parry, Brigadier-General Livingston's sister. She had been promised the appointment of Area Inspector, but had not sufficient experience or the qualifications necessary for such a responsible post so far as I could see.

I told Colonel Bersey how sorry I was that I could not suggest these ladies for the Senior posts, but that I would recommend them for less responsible ones, so as to enable them to gain the necessary experience which would justify me in promoting them as quickly as possible. We discussed the best way to arrange matters so as to avoid any unpleasantness for him, or undue disappointment for the candidates.

I saw each of the ladies as well as the members of the H.Q. Staff. I told them that the matter would go up to General Paine and Lord Weir in the ordinary course for decision. I strongly advised them not to persist in applying for the Senior posts, as, in the event of their not being accepted, I should be sorry if they declined the less responsible ones available. I made clear, however, that if it were decided to give them the higher appointments, I would do my utmost to enable them to carry out their duties, in spite of the fact that personally I had been unable to recommend them. It was obvious to me that none of these five women had the slightest idea of the difficulties and responsibilities of the Senior posts to which they aspired. If they had been more experienced and efficient, they would not have applied for them and risked inevitable failure in carrying out the duties.

When talking the matter over with me, they seemed to understand my difficulties and anxiety to adjust matters satisfactorily—they thanked me for my advice and kindness and said that they would consult their friends. I was surprised to find that they returned from these interviews in a very different frame of mind, making use of much the same phrase to the effect that they regretted having to decline to accept any but the posts promised them by Colonel Bersey. The matter then went up to Lord Weir and General Paine, and they upheld my view; but they went a step further, and decided that all five ladies were only to be offered Junior posts as Assistant Hostel Administrators, while I had suggested that two of them should, on account of previous work, be given the higher appointments of Hostel Administrator and Technical Superintendent—*i.e.*, a Woman Officer who looks after the welfare of the women working under men in the Air Force technical workshops.

General Paine sent me the following minute, confirming the decision arrived at by Lord Weir and himself:—

"Commandant, W.R.A.F.
Miss Leonard, Mrs. Taylor, Mrs. Lawrence,
Miss Taylor, Mrs. M. Livingston Parry.

The above-named ladies are to be informed that they cannot be appointed to a post of a higher grade than that of IX. (Assistant Hostel Administrator), and that they will be eligible for appointment to a higher post, if and when they are so recommended.

If they are unwilling to accept the post of Assistant Hostel Administrator, they should be informed that their services cannot be utilised in the Women's Royal Air Force.

(*Initialled*) G.P., M.G.P."

[Major-General Sir GODFREY PAINE, Master-General of Personnel].

As instructed I forwarded this decision to the five ladies concerned. They all thereupon declined the posts offered them, and said that they would prefer to leave the W.R.A.F.

They left the Office, and though I did not realise it immediately, I became the object of a bitter attack behind my back from their friends inside and outside the Air Ministry.

When I discussed this matter with the Deputy Commandant, Miss Pratt, she was greatly disappointed at Lord Weir's decision, and did not appear to recognise that efficiency and suitability must come before friendship and influence.

Hardly any of these women seemed to realise that the W.R.A.F. was enrolled and maintained at the public expense in order to do urgent work and to replace the men in war-time, and that, as servants of the public, we were bound to do that work.

The idea seemed to prevail at W.R.A.F. Headquarters that the Corps was merely a means to attain social distinction and distraction, and the much-coveted decorations, and that office work was derogatory, and, however urgent, was merely "clerk's work."

All these women were informed when called up for training that they would be given appointments according

to their qualifications when their Course was concluded—yet they were so unreasonable as to protest that I had broken faith with them, when they proved after training to be unsuitable for these particular posts.

That General Paine agreed with me that efficiency and experience were required, is shown by the reply he sent to a letter from one of the disappointed candidates, who wrote protesting against my alleged injustice, and who threatened legal proceedings. General Paine replied:

> **"I most strongly concur with Miss Douglas-Pennant that it would be a fatal mistake to appoint Women Officers to high positions until they have thoroughly proved themselves capable of filling them."**

When the Air Ministry published the White Paper (Cmd. 254), shortly before the House of Lords Inquiry, it contained a collection of letters from applicants for posts, including the five candidates for senior positions.

From these letters, it is evident that they had been promised these appointments before they went through their training, and that Miss Taylor had actually been in the receipt of a salary as an Area Inspector before her appointment had been referred to the Air Ministry for sanction.

An attempt seems to have been made to regularise this irregularity, by sending her an official letter, duly notifying her of her appointment as an Area Inspector at the appropriate salary. This letter, which is undated, is also unsigned—the word "Commandant" being typed by way of signature.

Copy. "Commandant, W.R.A.F., to Miss Taylor,
Air Ministry.

To Miss G. Taylor,
White Hall,
21, Montagu Street, W.C. 2.

Madam,

I have to inform you that your recent application for appointment as an Officer in the W.R.A.F. has been approved by the Selection and Medical Boards, with effect from May 13th, 1918, and that you have been attached to the South-Eastern Area, as Area Inspector, Grade VI., at an annual salary of £200, and Quarters.

.....Commandant."

This undated letter, notifying her of of her appointment, refers to May 13th—the day on which I first came to the Air Ministry. It must, therefore, have been written after that date, and the fact that the word "Commandant" is used below the vacant signature space points to this. The whole matter seems to be irregular, as it is not signed by me, though the Air Ministry laid down that every document, even purely routine ones and stock letters, must be signed by the Commandant's personal signature, otherwise they would not be accepted by the Records Department.

In his evidence, before the House of Lords Inquiry, Colonel Bersey stated, in reply to his Counsel, that these five ladies were not recommended for higher posts. "They were," he said, "recommended for appointments as Officers," and when asked, "Had you anything to do with the giving of appointments?" he replied, "Nothing whatever!"

On the other hand, there is Colonel Bersey's letter, creating, at the request of Colonel Janson, at Hurst Park, the post of Technical Administrator, which did not exist under the regulations, and authorising equivalent pay to the W.R.A.F. Officer, Miss Livesay, to whom he gave this appointment (*see* pages 392-394). Colonel Bersey also said in evidence "that one of the five candidates, Mrs. Livingston Parry, General Livingston's sister, did not 'he believed,' go through the Selection and Medical Boards, as she had been transferred from the Q.M.A.A.C." Mrs. Livingston Parry was never in the Q.M.A.A.C. She was a civilian clerk in the Records Office of that Corps, and, under the Regulations, all candidates have to go before the Selection and Medical Boards before being accepted.

Colonel Bersey's Counsel (Mr. P. Hastings) questioned him further on this point:—

"Leave out Mrs. Livingston Parry for the moment. Until these ladies came up for these appointments, had you seen any of those four in your life?"

Colonel Bersey: "I had never seen any of the five, except Mrs. Lawrence."

.....

Mr. Hastings: "You had never seen any of the other four?"

Colonel Bersey: "Mrs. Lawrence was the wife of a very old friend of mine."

Mr. Hastings: "Had you ever had any communication with them before they came up for their appointment?"

Colonel Bersey: "No. . . . I had never seen or heard of them."

Colonel Bersey's evidence is inaccurate, as certain of these ladies had been working with him for some time at W.R.A.F. H.Q., and, during the early days, *actually in the same room.*

From the correspondence published afterwards in the White Paper, it appears that Miss Taylor wrote the following letter to Colonel Bersey on September 5th, the day I left the office after my dismissal.

Copy.

"21, Ashburnham Mansions,
Chelsea, S.W.
5th September, 1918.

Dear Colonel Bersey,

I have just come back to town and hear a rumour that the Commandant is leaving. Of course, it may only be a rumour and quite untrue. If it is true, I am writing to say how much I would like to come back and work with you again. As you know, I don't mind how hard I work, or how long the hours, under the happy conditions which we work with you, and if you think I am any good, you have only to say so, and I will come.

Yours sincerely,
(*Signed*) G. TAYLOR."

In a Statement, dated May 31st, 1919, which Miss Leonard sent to the Press, to the Air Ministry, and to Members of both Houses of Parliament, she points out that she started work with Colonel Bersey in February, 1918, when his Staff consisted of herself and one Air Force Officer. She refers therein to Colonel Bersey's offer to give her the appointment of Area Superintendent on her having completed the organisation of his office (*see* White Paper, Cmd. 254).

In reply to my Counsel, Colonel Bersey said:—

"We deliberately left the final appointment of these women over, till Miss Douglas-Pennant's arrival, as a compliment to her. They could have been confirmed in their appointments before she came."

This statement is misleading, as neither Miss Leonard, Mrs. Lawrence, Mrs. Livingston Parry, nor Mrs. Taylor had been through a Training Course before my appointment.

It will be remembered that I came on a "month's look round" on May 13th, 1918. The dates on which these candidates were called up for training are as follows:—

Mrs. Taylor	...	May 14th, 1918.
Miss Leonard	...	May 27th, „
Mrs. Lawrence	...	May 27th, „
Mrs. Livingston Parry,		June 11th, „

It is difficult, therefore, to see how they could have been legitimately appointed before training, or how these facts bear out Colonel Bersey's assurance that these appointments were deliberately left until my arrival, out of compliment to me, "though," he adds, "they could have been confirmed in their appointments before she came."

Colonel Bersey's statement, at the House of Lords Inquiry, that these ladies were not appointed, is inconsistent with the letters I received from them, and which were published in the White Paper (Cmd. 254). From these letters, it is clear that they considered that they had already been appointed, before their training, to these Senior posts for which, unfortunately, they proved unsuitable during training.

Miss Taylor wrote to me on July 1st, informing me that after Mrs. Beatty and Miss Pratt joined the W.R.A.F., it was arranged that she should become an Area Inspector, and this letter is signed, "Gertrude Taylor, *Area Inspector, W.R.A.F.*"

Mrs. Lawrence also wrote to me on July 1st, declining the lesser post I offered her, and signing herself, "Area Inspector on Probation."

Miss Leonard wrote to me on June 29th, saying:—

> "I was offered a specific appointment, namely, that of Area Superintendent, and, on this understanding, I resigned my civilian post."

On July 9th, 1918, I received a further letter from her, declining the lower appointment, which, on the instructions of Lord Weir and General Paine, I had offered her. In this letter she says:—

> "I have to inform you that, as the W.R.A.F. declines to fulfil the engagement made to me on its behalf by Lieut.-Colonel Bersey, I regret to say that I am unable to accept the appointment now offered to me."

In this Statement already referred to, Miss Leonard complains that I did not appoint her to the post of Area Superintendent, which, she alleged, Colonel Bersey had promised her. She declared, further, that she interviewed Colonel Bersey on July 3rd, 1918, and that he told her that she had been "very badly treated, but said that he was powerless to do anything."

This interview took place immediately after Miss Leonard had received the Minute, informing her of Lord Weir's and General Paine's decision that she could not, at present, be given the appointment of Area Superintendent. Miss Leonard concludes her Statement with the personal assurance—

> "I am convinced that, in offering me the position he did, Colonel Bersey thought he was securing for the Service, then badly in need of Officers, a suitable and experienced candidate."

During the House of Lords Inquiry, it was evidently part of the Air Ministry's case to prove that I had acted unjustly in not recommending these ladies for high posts. Mrs. Beatty and Miss Andrew gave evidence to this effect. Miss Leonard appeared in Court and herself cross-examined me as to my reasons for not carrying out Colonel Bersey's promise. Other evidence was available, but the Chairman (Lord Wrenbury) told the Counsel for the Air Ministry that it was not needed.

> "Mr. Rigby Swift: My Lord . . . . I do not know whether your Lordships think it is worth my while to pursue the line of inquiry on which Miss Leonard has given evidence, but I am quite prepared to call all the five. Three of them are here now.
>
> "Lord Wrenbury: You will take your own course. I can only say that if I were in your place, I should not call them. I should not think it necessary.
>
> "Mr. Rigby Swift: I hope I can take a hint, my Lord."

In view of all this documentary and verbal evidence, the position taken up by Colonel Bersey's Counsel during my cross-examination was difficult to follow.

> "Mr. Patrick Hastings: If I tell you that I am prepared to prove that Colonel Bersey never even saw, never had seen, and never even knew the names of four out of the five ladies at that time that the appointment came up to him, do you still persist in your allegation?
>
> "Miss Douglas-Pennant: I should be very much astonished."

. . . . . .

"Mr. Patrick Hastings: Supposing that Colonel Bersey had never seen and never knew any one of those four ladies before the appointment came up to him, do you still desire to persist . . . . ?

"Miss Douglas-Pennant: If he never knew them, certainly not. I could not.

"Mr. Patrick Hastings: And if that be established, would you desire at some time to express your regret for that?

"Miss Douglas-Pennant: Certainly, if it were established."

Mr. Patrick Hastings declared later that I had done Colonel Bersey a great injustice, and he assured the Court that "of those five ladies four, Mr. Bersey had never seen or spoken to in his life."

Miss Leonard also wrote, after my dismissal, to Lieut.-Colonel Williams, one of Colonel Bersey's Staff Officers, at W.R.A.F. Headquarters. In this letter, dated September 13th, 1918, which is published in the White Paper (Cmd. 254), Miss Leonard refers to his suggestion that he should arrange an interview between her and the new Commandant, with a view to obtaining an appointment in the W.R.A.F., she adds:—

"I will not bother you with all the details of my particular case, but will merely reiterate roughly the outstanding facts. I was, on the inauguration of the W.R.A.F., first of all lent, and finally transferred, to that Force, in charge of civil staff and organisation. Subsequently, Colonel Bersey decided that he would rather have me as a W.R.A.F. Officer when these posts were created; in the meanwhile, I was to remain at Headquarters and, I understood, to do some inspecting work. Miss Douglas-Pennant, the late Commandant, however, declined to ratify any of the appointments arranged before she came."

Mrs. Livingston Parry wrote to me on July 13th, 1918, saying that she had "not received the rate of salary which was promised me after my first month's service at Headquarters—*i.e.*, that of Area Inspector, because the offer of that post had been withdrawn."

In spite of the fact that the White Paper, containing these letters, was before the Court of Inquiry when Colonel Bersey gave his evidence, their Lordships accepted his statement that he had

"nothing whatever to do with the giving of appointments, and had never seen or heard of the five ladies—except Mrs. Lawrence—or had any communication with them before they came up for appointment."

The finding of the Court on this point is as follows:—

"Then comes the incident of the five ladies—Mrs. Taylor, Mrs. Livingston Parry, Miss Taylor, Mrs. Lawrence, Miss Leonard, who Colonel Bersey, as she (Miss Douglas-Pennant) says, was trying to job into high posts. **The fact is that, as to four of them, he had never seen them, or had any communication with them, or even heard of them before they came up for appointment,** and that the fifth, Mrs. Lawrence (the wife of Colonel Lawrence, a very old friend of Colonel Bersey's) was recommended for the W.R.A.F. by General Mark Kerr, G.O.C. Headquarters, Salisbury, with a request that if she were appointed, she might be posted to his own Headquarters."

As Mrs. Lawrence was the lady without any experience, who feared that a simple examination would bring on a nervous breakdown, I felt that my duty to the women necessitated at all costs the appointment of a woman Officer who could be relied on to ensure their well-being. It was unfortunate that Major-General Kerr's wishes, in the case of Mrs. Lawrence, could not, for these reasons, be met; but it was evident that he did not realise that she had no experience of work.

It is perhaps owing to their Lordships not having thought it necessary to test this and other matters that I find myself described in the Report as "the *libeller*," and as one who has not hesitated to bring unfounded accusations which, to quote from the Report, their Lordships regard as

"so foolish, so largely based upon nothing more than baseless suspicion, as not to be worthy of review."

It is difficult to understand why their Lordships rejected the evidence of Mrs. Beatty, Miss Andrew, and Miss Leonard on this point, though the Court accepted their evidence unreservedly when they made allegations reflecting on me.

CHAPTER VI.

War-time Deserters.

On June 24th, I asked Mrs. Beatty (transferred from the W.R.N.S.) who was in charge of the Probationary Officers' Training Course, to arrange for me to interview the Women Officers who had been through their Course and were about to join the Stations to which they had been posted. Though I had arranged the syllabus of training it had been impossible for me, owing to my other urgent work, to see much, personally, of the Probationary Officers during training, beyond giving them their opening lectures, and visiting the Hostel to satisfy myself that everything was being done for their comfort and well-being. I was therefore anxious to get into personal touch with them before they left, and to assure them that they must regard me in any time of difficulty and trouble as their friend as well as their Commandant.

On the first occasion that I had interviewed 25 Probationary Officers there had been unnecessary confusion and loss of time owing to the unauthorised and conflicting instructions given them. I therefore discussed with Mrs. Beatty how best to arrange matters, she promised to see that all was in order and that the necessary files and records were sent to the Training Hostel—also the Railway Warrants without which the Officers could not leave for their various posts. I have no doubt that Mrs. Beatty understood fully what was required.

On June 25th, after giving the opening lecture to the newly-arrived Probationary Officers, I interviewed the 25 who were just off to their new posts. I found that Mrs. Beatty had not carried out my instructions—there were no files or records or railway warrants. Much confusion ensued—some of the Officers were due to leave that afternoon for their posts in Scotland, but were unable to do so without the railway warrants. As their homes were mostly in the country and the Training Hostel was occupied by the incoming candidates, I had the greatest difficulty in finding accommodation for them. It was a bad breakdown—reflecting seriously on my administration—and naturally caused great indignation on the part of the parents of some of the Officers.

During the interviews I found myself at a serious disadvantage in talking to the Officers, as I was unable without the records, to refer to their past experience.

While interviewing one of the Officers who had been selected by Miss Pratt and Mrs. Beatty before I became Commandant, she suddenly began to threaten me in a most irresponsible manner. I was giving her my good wishes for her new post, when she said:

"You do not know to which Camp I was attached during my last week's training."

I replied that, owing to the absence of her file, I did not remember, as I had many others to make arrangements for. This Officer then said:

"This shall be noted against you—we'll tell Northcliffe and the Press that you do not know what is going on. Northcliffe is on you already, and he means to know more."

I replied that if Lord Northcliffe wished to know anything about the W.R.A.F., I felt sure that he would ask me direct and not act on hearsay, and that I should have the greatest pleasure in giving him all information in my power. She then complained that I had not given her a high enough post and assured me that she had very influential friends in the Air Ministry who intended to look after her, adding:

"Do you mean to do as you are asked, and post me higher? You had better do so—there are four highly-placed Generals, and others in the Air Ministry, who mean to get rid of you unless you do as you are wanted to. Mark my words—you will be outside looking for a job if you do not do what you ought in this matter. You will be outside in another week or two—see if you are not. You ask Mrs. Beatty."

This amazing tirade from a Junior Officer showed me the unsuitable type of women the Selection Board was passing, and the utter lack of discipline and loyalty of some of the Corps.

It transpired that the officer in question wrote to Lord Weir, complaining that I had persecuted her, and later on I found, that though I had not seen her again, she had spread stories alleging that I had treated her cruelly and caused a breakdown in her health.

The procession of Women War Workers took place at Buckingham Palace on Saturday, June 29th. The Air Council decided that the W.R.A.F. could not take part, as the uniforms were not available. Many of them, who

had transferred from the Q.M.A.A.C. and W.R.N.S. were still wearing the uniforms of those Corps, and General Paine told me that it was not considered desirable that they should march past in the uniforms of a Corps from which they had transferred.

The Secretary of the Air Ministry wrote to the Ministry of Labour, which was in charge of the arrangements, explaining the circumstances, and I called on the Queen's Lady-in-Waiting to express the disappointment and regret of the Women's Royal Air Force. I also sent a circular letter to the W.R.A.F. Depots and Hostels in the London Area, explaining matters, and telling them how sorry I was, as Commandant, that we could not take this opportunity of showing our loyalty. I saw all the Staff at H.Q. on the morning of the procession, and, as I knew they were anxious to see it, I gave them leave over the week-end. I noticed that the Deputy Commandant (Miss Pratt) seemed worried and perturbed. Thinking that she was troubled about her mother, who had been ill, I suggested that she should take leave over the week-end until the following Wednesday, to enable her to go to her home. Miss Pratt seemed much embarrassed and declined my offer. I enquired if there was anything I could do to help her, but she assured me that all was well.

As the W.R.A.F. were prevented from taking part in the procession, I did not appear officially, but watched the review from a window at Buckingham Palace. Later on, I was horrified to hear that rumours had been spread that I had refused to allow the W.R.A.F. to march in the procession, owing to my alleged personal disloyalty (*see* pages 169-172), and that great indignation was felt among the officers and rank and file, who keenly resented that their Commandant's action and views should cast such a reflection on the loyalty of the Corps.

On my return home from the office at midnight, I found a telephone call asking me to ring up a certain number, however late, as someone had an urgent message for me. It proved to be from an Officer, who explained that his information was too private to telephone from the office. He warned me that there was a "big intrigue" on foot to get rid of me, as I was "too straight and just and keen about the work." He told me that he could not help overhearing what was being arranged as certain of the

Men and Women Officers were determined to get me out, and that he felt it was only fair to warn me to be on my guard, as I did not seem to suspect what was going on behind my back. I made no comment, and merely thanked him for his kindness, and, as I could not credit what he told me, I decided not to take any notice and put it out of my mind.

His warning, however, proved to be amply justified. On the following Monday morning (July 1st) I was just leaving the office for a very full day, when the Deputy Commandant (Miss Pratt), the Assistant Commandant (Mrs. Beatty), and Miss Taylor (one of the Probationary Officers who had been refused the post of Area Inspector), came into my room (*see* pages 36, 41). So little did I imagine that anything was amiss that I looked up from my writing to wish them good-morning, and expressed the hope that they had all had a good rest on Sunday. I also alluded to the splendid procession on Saturday, and to the fine turn-out of the W.R.N.S. and other Corps. To my astonishment, they made no reply, and simultaneously handed me three official envelopes which, they said, contained their resignations. Being unaware of any friction or grievance, I was dumbfounded. They then handed me three receipts, which Mrs. Beatty very abruptly asked me to sign as proof, she said, that I had received their resignations. I saw that something very serious must have happened, but as I had to start off at once to keep urgent appointments, I could only say that I was quite at a loss to understand the cause, and that I would gladly see them on my return that evening, and, that, in the meantime, I hoped that they would think the matter over, and withdraw their resignations.

That same morning, I attended the Joint Conference of Women's Corps (Q.M.A.A.C., W.R.N.S., Red Cross, and Women's Legion), held fortnightly at the Admiralty. Dame K. Furse was present. I did not see her to speak to, but I passed her a little friendly note, congratulating her on the splendid appearance of the W.R.N.S. in the procession and expressing my admiration.

After the meeting, I met Colonel Bersey, and before I had an opportunity to mention the matter to him, he asked me about the resignations, saying that he had heard of them from Dame K. Furse. As she had nothing to do

with the administration of the W.R.A.F., this surprised me very much, as it showed that she knew about the resignations before I did. I had no notion, at that time, that Dame K. Furse had interviewed Mrs. Beatty and Miss Pratt during the week-end when their sudden resignations were decided on. A few days before (June 28th), Colonel Bersey asked me if I did not think that it would be a good plan if the W.R.N.S. and the W.R.A.F. were to amalgamate. Believing him to be joking, I asked laughingly whether he meant the W.R.A.F. to swallow the W.R.N.S. or the W.R.N.S. the W.R.A.F. Colonel Bersey then seriously suggested that the two Corps should be united, and asked for my opinion. I told him that I could not express any opinion, and that I had never given the question any thought as matters of policy were for the higher powers.

When I returned to the Office on July 1st, I found a letter of resignation from another Assistant Commandant, Miss K. Andrew. This surprised me even more than the others, as when I had last seen her she seemed so happy in her work. I asked her if anything was the matter and whether I could help her in any way. Miss Andrew seemed very much embarrassed and did not appear to know how to reply. After much hesitation, she told me that she understood that the W.R.A.F. was not going to "count," and that she did not wish therefore to belong to it. I assured her that as soon as the W.R.A.F. was organised, I had no doubt that it would be a very fine Corps, and I wanted everyone to help me to start it on good lines. Miss Andrew, however, said that as the King had not mentioned it in his speech to the Women's Corps on June 30th, it was evident that it was not intended to "count." As she was leaving for Scotland that night for a week, I told her to think the matter over, and that I would not take any step until her return.

I saw Miss Pratt and Mrs. Beatty separately that evening and asked them to tell me the real cause of their resignations. They both said that they had no reason whatever beyond what they had mentioned in their letters. Their manner was very mysterious. I felt convinced that both were acting under instructions, and that they wished to avoid questions to which they had no reply. Miss Pratt merely complained in her letter

of the disorganisation and overwork before I became Commandant, and her fear that she would continue to be overworked, as the Office was still disorganised.

I begged Miss Pratt to explain this sudden *volte face* in her attitude, and reminded her that only a few nights before when giving her a lift home in my taxi, she had told me how much she enjoyed working with me, that they were all so relieved and happy now I was Commandant, and that she hoped that the work would not be too much for me as they could not spare me. Miss Pratt seemed very much embarrassed, and she answered in a stereotyped phrase to the effect that "no good purpose would be served by entering into the matter."

Mrs. Beatty's complaints were trivial; she alleged that I had allowed a Junior W.R.N.S. Officer to supply me with information regarding the W.R.N.S. scheme of organisation—"this form of procedure," she declared, "being absolutely out of order, from a Service point of view."

I asked Mrs. Beatty to explain what she meant by this passage in her letter, and she said that she was surprised that it was necessary to explain. Her complaint was so petty that it would not be worth mentioning, were it not for the fact that it has been brought forward as a serious reason for her resignation, and as a proof of my unsuitability for the post of Commandant.

The sole ground for Mrs. Beatty's grievance was that some W.R.N.S. officers called at H.Q. soon after I arrived and the W.R.N.S. regulations were mentioned. I happened to remark that we were about to issue the revised W.R.A.F. ones—(F.S. Pub. 14). One of the W.R.N.S. officers, hearing that I had not seen their regulations, offered to send me a copy for reference, as the Q.M.A.A.C. had already done so. How such a simple matter could reflect so gravely on me, or militate against the best interests of the Service cannot easily be imagined (*see* pages 327-328).

Mrs. Beatty also alleged, in her letter, that she had insufficient staff. I reminded her that she had a far larger one than anyone else, and that, only a week before, she had asked me to let a friend of hers, Miss Bear (*see* pages 60, 61), be posted to work in her room. I had readily agreed, and Mrs. Beatty had then assured me that she had all the help she needed. In reply, Mrs. Beatty

merely made much the same remark as Miss Pratt—"that no useful purpose would be served by discussing the matter."

It is difficult to describe my astonishment on receiving these sudden resignations, as I was unaware of the slightest friction or dissatisfaction. I was under the impression that the happiest terms existed between the W.R.A.F. H.Q. Staff and myself. Colonel Bersey repeatedly volunteered his pleasure at working with someone who never "fussed." Miss Pratt constantly consulted me about her work and told me of her home worries. Miss Andrew had thanked me for taking her on my tour of inspection, saying that she considered it an "honour to serve" under me. In view of the extraordinary circumstances which led to my dismissal from the Service, I feel obliged to mention these apparently egotistical details, as they show how incomprehensible the conduct of the Officers was at the time and how strong the pressure must have been which induced them to act so disloyally in war-time.

I had invariably consulted these Officers and kept them in touch with all that concerned the W.R.A.F. I was amazed when, during the House of Lords Inquiry, they alleged that I was a violent-tempered virago, who used insulting language, refused to allow them any authority, and was impossible to work with (*see* pages 300-335).

I had noticed that Mrs. Beatty seemed somewhat unwilling to throw herself into the work, but I attributed this to a natural feeling of strangeness in a new Corps, and hoped that she would soon settle down.

In their evidence, Mrs. Beatty and Miss Pratt complained that I did not allow them to write letters, especially to M.P.s, and Mrs. Beatty stated that I gave them orders that M.P.s were not to be told the truth, The true facts are as follows:—

My attention had been drawn by Registry to certain letters written by Miss Pratt and Mrs. Beatty, which ought to have been referred to a higher authority before being sent out, and complaints had been received from an M.P. and others of the curt and discourteous replies received from them on questions which should have

been decided by more experienced opinion. Lady Methuen, wife of the then Governor of Malta, wrote complaining that a letter she had written had received an unsuitable reply, ignoring the urgent matter she had referred to. I wrote immediately to Lady Methuen, offering apologies, and assuring her that the discourteous letter she had received had been written before my appointment. I also explained that as the point raised by her involved a large question of policy, *i.e.*, the training of Maltese women on aeroplane work, I had at once, on receipt of her personal letter, referred the matter to General Paine for the Air Council's decision, which would be conveyed to her by the Secretary of the Air Ministry.

During an Office Conference, I had explained to Miss Pratt, Mrs. Beatty, and Miss Andrew that I should leave each to manage the Section of which she was in charge, and that I should not interfere unless there was a break-down. I added, however, that I should expect them to refer to me on any matters of policy, or questions which were likely to cause trouble. I also impressed upon them that in order to avoid mistakes, they must train their Juniors to discriminate between an urgent and a non-urgent matter. I remember adding that as I intended to defend them with my last breath in the event of criticism, they must be sure to keep in close touch with me.

In their evidence at the House of Lords Inquiry, Mrs. Beatty and Miss Pratt also said that I had made insulting remarks to them and Mrs. Beatty declared that I had assured them that no decent women would come to the Selection Board unless I was present.

This is untrue. The facts are that at the Office Conference, just referred to, I had discussed in the friendliest way the procedure followed at the Officers' Selection Board, as I was becoming uneasy at the type of candidate the Labour Ministry sent up to the Selection Boards.

Certain Probationary Officers had proved to be so unsatisfactory during their training, that I made enquiries as to how such obviously unsuitable women had been passed by the Selection Board (*see* pages 83-87). I was then informed that it was the custom to pass any candidates

who brought a recommendation from Officers in the Air Force, or Air Ministry, regardless, apparently, of their qualifications.

I impressed upon the Members of the Selection Board that it was their duty to give an unbiased opinion as to the suitability of each candidate, and that their selection of Officers must be based on merit and merit alone, regardless of influence from any quarter. This decision gave great offence, as it prevented certain women being appointed who desired to be near their friends in the Air Force.

During the House of Lords Inquiry it was alleged that I had criticised the clothes of certain W.R.A.F. Officers. As Lord Wrenbury in his report has taken a serious view of what would seem to be a trivial matter I feel obliged to allude to it.

My attention had been drawn to the unsuitable clothes worn by some of those attached to W.R.A.F. Headquarters while at work—the Probationary Officer, who had been appointed an Area Inspector without my knowledge, was one of these. As she wore an artistic garment, resembling a "tea-gown," with a band of gold braid round her hair when on day duty in the office, I asked her if she had a dark coat and skirt, as I told her that until we were in uniform we must all wear simple and practical plain clothes. At the same time I mentioned that I hoped it would not put her to any extra expense in war-time, as it would not matter how old they were.

I also said the same to another W.R.A.F. Officer and told her that we must refrain from wearing jewellery, other than a simple brooch. No reasonable person could possibly have taken offence at this action of mine, which all Senior Officers constantly have to take in the course of their duties of training those under them. Yet their Lordships, in the Report, quote that I "found fault with her over the clothes she wore," as affirmative evidence of my alleged rudeness when "estimating 'my' character and disposition as to whether 'I had shown' myself to be 'chivalrous, courteous, considerate—to be one who would rather attribute a good motive than a bad one," and be "someone who would probably work harmoniously with others."

My refusal to issue an order that "tea gowns" were to be worn by W.R.A.F. Officers instead of uniform when on duty in the Hostels at night caused great disappointment in some quarters, and it was alleged that I was "lacking in the human touch they desired." As these Officers had to go in and out about the Camps where the Hostels were situated, I had no hesitation in declining such an unsuitable and unpractical request.

Miss Pratt and Mrs. Beatty refused to withdraw their resignations. I reported the matter the next morning (July 2nd) to General Paine. Later on in the day he took me to see Sir W. Weir (Lord Weir). This was the first time I had met the Secretary of State for Air. Sir W. Weir asked me about the qualifications of the Deputy and Assistant Commandants. I told him that I had no complaint whatever, as, up to the moment they resigned, I was quite unaware of any friction. I said that I hoped that their resignations would be refused, as I felt sure that there must be some misunderstanding which could be cleared away. Sir W. Weir, however, decided that without question these Officers must leave with the exception of Miss K. Andrew, who, at my suggestion, he agreed should be allowed to remain on trial for a month. I suggested this, as I felt that possibly owing to her youth and inexperience, she had been misled by Miss Pratt and Mrs. Beatty, and had only resigned under some mistaken feeling of loyalty to them, and I hoped that she would settle down (*see* pages 82-85).

In our interview Sir W. Weir told me the Officers were to remain at their posts until relieved, so that I might have time to secure others to replace them. He told me that he had every confidence in my ability to carry out the work.

General Paine wrote a Minute in which I was instructed to inform Miss Pratt and Mrs. Beatty that their resignations were accepted, but that they were to remain at their posts until relieved. Miss Pratt came to see me on receipt of this Minute, and asked me to give her leave, as she did not wish to remain in the Office. I explained that General Paine's orders debarred me from doing so unless she was ill, in which case I would willingly give her sick leave and explain matters to him.

Miss Pratt seemed much annoyed, and complained that it was most unfair of me—I endeavoured to get her to take a reasonable view; but she left the room abruptly, making use of the same phrase as before—no good purpose can be served by entering into a discussion, etc.

In the House of Lords Inquiry, Miss Pratt alleged she had a "painful interview" with me, during which I lost all self-control, and that she felt unable to return to the Office. I have no knowledge of any such interview (*see* pages 324-326).

The following day (July 3rd), Colonel Bersey told me that he intended to resign, and he asked whether I should mind if he said that he could not work with me. I asked him if that was the true reason, as he had constantly told me that he enjoyed working with someone who never "fussed," and a few days before had said that he could not understand why "Nothing ever seems to upset you." Colonel Bersey looked much embarrassed, and said that he supposed he must give some reason, and did I think that General Paine would believe him? I did not know at the time that Colonel Bersey had received on July 1st a Minute from General Paine expressing dissatisfaction with his organisation of M.3, and the delays in expediting matters, especially with regard to housing and equipment of the W.R.A.F. (*see* page 272).

The next day, Colonel Bersey again came to see me. He had just heard that the W.R.A.F. resignations had been accepted, and that there was no question of my leaving. His manner was now most friendly—he begged me to tell General Paine that he wished to withdraw his resignation, as he "had only sent it in the previous day, owing to depression caused by influenza." I told him that I could not broach the subject with General Paine, as it was impossible for me to interfere in a matter concerning himself, Brigadier-General Livingston, and General Paine, unless the latter invited me to do so. I assured Colonel Bersey that I was very glad to hear that he felt able to continue to work with me, as I had no doubt that with his co-operation the W.R.A.F. would soon be on a sound footing. He told me that he greatly admired the stand I had made about the five women, and also in refusing unsuitable accommodation, and he declared that

he would never have respected me if I had acted otherwise. Later that evening he told me that he had seen General Paine and that everything was settled satisfactorily. I saw General Paine the next day, and he told me that as Colonel Bersey seemed very anxious to remain, he had consented to his doing so, and that he hoped that he would now pull his Department together—anyhow, he would see how things went in M.3.

The next day (July 4th) the Officers' Selection Board met, which was attended by candidates who came up at the Government's expense from all parts of the country, some even from Ireland. The Board was due to begin at 10 a.m. at the Central Office of the Employment Exchange. Miss Pratt and Mrs. Beatty were in charge, and they were aware that my duties that day would prevent my attending before noon. When I arrived, I found the passage and waiting-room blocked with rows of depressed candidates who had been waiting since 10 a.m. with no one to interview them.

The Labour Ministry's Representative on the Selection Board (who was a friend of Miss Pratt and Mrs. Beatty) and Mrs. Beatty's clerk, were present, but had not considered it necessary to warn me by 'phone that the W.R.A.F. Officers (Miss Pratt and Mrs. Beatty) were absent. The Medical Board, which consisted at that time of Q.M.A.A.C. Women Doctors, was waiting in another building to examine candidates passed by the Selection Board.

This breakdown reflected seriously on me, and gave the impression throughout the country and to the other Corps that my organisation was very bad.

In spite of the instructions of Sir W. Weir (Lord Weir), Miss Pratt and Mrs. Beatty never returned to the Office; but I contrived to keep my numerous appointments and interview the candidates, many of whom had to catch trains back to the country.

The action of these W.R.A.F. Officers in deserting their posts and deliberately endeavouring to obstruct work in war-time has reflected most seriously on women, and has cast a grave doubt as to their suitability for responsible positions where loyalty, steadfastness, and a sense of honour are indispensable.

When the White Paper (Cmd. 254) was published, I saw for the first time the following letters from Mrs. Beatty and Miss Pratt :—

Copy.

"131, Coleherne Court, S.W.
3rd July, 1918.

The Commandant, W.R.A.F.,
Mason's Yard,
Duke Street, W. 1.

Dear Madam,

I have to acknowledge receipt of your letter of to-day's date, informing me that my resignation has been accepted by the Secretary of State.

I regret that I am unable to return to the office as suggested, but, in view of your attitude in the painful interview which took place in your room this morning, it is evident that no useful purpose would be served thereby.

Yours faithfully,
(*Signed*) E. H. PRATT."

Copy.

"16, Belsize Lane,
Hampstead, N.W. 3.
4th July, 1918.

Madam,

I am in receipt of your letter conveying the acceptance of my resignation from the Secretary of State.

I regret that under existing conditions I could not accept the responsibility of even temporary duty in the W.R.A.F.

Yours faithfully,
(*Signed*) MABEL BEATTY.

The Commandant,
W.R.A.F. Headquarters,
Mason's Yard,
Duke Street, W."

As these letters, though addressed to me, did not reach me, I had no notification of the determination of these Officers to leave their work.

I did not know at the time that Dame K. Furse offered Miss Pratt, Mrs. Beatty, and Miss Andrew posts in the W.R.N.S. Mrs. Beatty and Miss Andrew both joined that Corps. Miss Pratt declined, as the post of Deputy Director was unavailable, but she later accepted another Government appointment (*see* pages 428-429).

When I returned to the Office later in the evening, I found that a report had been spread that everyone was to resign. The Administrator in charge of the Probationary Officers' Training Hostel actually sent in her resignation, but I refused to accept it, as she told me that she had no

wish to go; but that Mrs. Beatty had told her that everyone was to resign. The Head Civilian Clerk in charge of the Probationary Officers' files also resigned, evidently much against her wish, and she told a reliable witness that she had been asked to do so temporarily, as a change was going to be made at the W.R.A.F. H.Q., after which they would all be brought back.

Miss Bear, the Probationary Officer, whom I had allocated at Mrs. Beatty's request to her Staff, also left without giving any intimation, and in spite of a telegram summoning her to return to duty, she stayed away for a week. Miss Bear wrote to say that she would not return unless I gave her the post of Area Superintendent of Inspectors. I was unable to recommend her for such a responsible post; but offered to appoint her as a Hostel Administrator, so that she might gain the necessary experience. She declined and left the Office, and wrote complaints to Lord Weir that I had treated her most unjustly, alleging that I had definitely promised her a post of Superintendent of Area Inspectors before she went into training. This was untrue, as under the Regulations it would have been impossible for me to have done so (*see* pages 36-37).

A certain Officer who called to see me regarding his wife's transfer from another Corps was assured in Colonel Bersey's Department that there was no Woman Commandant in charge of the W.R.A.F. as great changes were being made, and that all enquiries should be referred to Colonel Bersey in M.3.

Soon afterwards a W.R.A.F. Officer transferred from the Q.M.A.A.C. came to H.Q. in a state of great agitation, having been told by a Senior Q.M.A.A.C. Officer that the W.R.A.F. was to be broken up immediately and handed back to the Navy and Army. She seemed much surprised to find me in the Office, and everything working as usual. Others who wished to join were advised not to do so, as the W.R.A.F. it was stated was not going to be allowed to continue, and that the Commandant, who had turned out to be stronger than expected, was going to be got rid of like her predecessor had been, and the Corps brought again under the control of the Admiralty and War Office.

CHAPTER VII.

Dame K. Furse and Mrs. Beatty.

The moment selected for creating friction in the W.R.A.F. was the most critical of the War. As we were in the middle of the worst Air Raids, and the women labour was desperately needed for repairing the machines and other indispensable work, I was determined that nothing should break it down, and I contrived to run the Office almost single-handed, with the help of my only assistant, a typist, Miss D. Reade, who was waiting to go through the Officers' Training Course. To her everlasting credit, she refused to resign, and worked in the most whole-hearted way.

The work was overwhelming. I had 14 'phones with unceasing trunk calls in different rooms to attend to day and night as well as all the interviews, conferences, inspections, and office routine work, not to speak of the schemes and questions of policy which had to be thought out and put forward in the shape of memoranda and minutes, but I am glad to say that no one outside the Office guessed the real state of affairs.

The influenza epidemic was raging at the time, and from all parts of the country I got urgent messages asking me for help, as the Officers and women were ill and there were as yet no medical arrangements.

Judging from these telephone calls, some of the W.R.A.F. Officers in charge of Hostels did not seem to have even the most elementary idea of how to deal with cases of slight illness. Several of them had never heard of taking a temperature, and they did not realise that bed and a hot water bottle were safe measures for the first stages of "flu."

The Administrator in charge of the Officers' Training Hostel went sick. I secured another Officer, but she never turned up, owing to influenza, and I found myself left with the Hostel on my hands, no Officer available, and twenty-five candidates arriving to start training on the following day. I asked the Controller of the Q.M.A.A.C. kindly to lend me the services of an

experienced Officer for a few days, until I could make arrangements. She consented, and promised to send a first-rate Hostel Administrator with experience of training, who, she said, happened to be available.

When this Officer arrived, however, doubtless owing to the emergencies of the times, she turned out to be a very inexperienced Junior Technical Officer, who assured me that though she was perfectly wllling to try to help, she could not undertake the work of the Training Centre, as she knew nothing about Hostel Administration or Training.

This only added to my difficulties, as the Assistant Hostel Administrators at the Hostel, naturally resented a Junior Officer of the same rank, but without Hostel experience, being brought in from another Corps to supervise them and the Probationary Officers.

Every use was made of this incident by the disloyal Officers to prejudice the W.R.A.F. Officers against me.

I at once set to work to build up the Office at Headquarters, but as I was only allowed to select from Officers already in the Force, or in the Government Service, or from among the Probationary Officers, I had a limited choice. Every promising Officer, trained in one of the monthly batches of twenty-five, was urgently required to supervise the rank and file, and take charge of a Hostel in one of the Air Force Camps. I had, therefore, to manage as best I could in the Office, by drafting in certain qualified women already in the Government Service, and I put forward a further appeal to the Air Ministry to provide me with adequate Training Accommodation.

I was overwhelmed with files and telephone calls during the day, the busiest time being between 12 and 3, which made it difficult for me to get any food; but this I contrived to do, as I was determined to keep fit.

For some unexplained reason the telephone calls for the 18th Wing (a R.A.F. Air Station adjoining Mason's Yard) were often switched on to me at night. As they were urgent trunk calls, which could not be disregarded in war-time, and none of Colonel Bersey's Staff were in the office, I had to take down these messages and pass them on in the midst of my other work.

I worked from 8 a.m. each day until the early hours of the next morning, Sundays included. Fortunately, a few days later, the Registry Expert returned at Colonel Bersey's request to help him to organise M.3. As I have already mentioned, General Paine had sent a Minute expressing his dissatisfaction at the lack of method and the unnecessary delays in that Department (*see* page 58).

The Registry Officer and other Officers volunteered to help me at night, after their own day's work was done. The Air Force Officer attached to the Probationary Officers' Training Hostel also brought his wife, and I cannot speak highly enough of their kindness and the splendid way in which they worked.

It is impossible to describe the chaos and confusion found in Miss Pratt and Mrs. Beatty's rooms. Cupboards full of unsorted and unanswered correspondence—some of it very urgent—such as appeals, for instructions how to deal with cases of serious illness, V.D., pregnancy, misconduct, as well as matters of ordinary routine. These arrears were so serious, that even after I had a sufficient office staff in training, it took the Registry Officer, a clerk (Air Mechanic), and myself many weeks working up to 1 a.m. (midnight) to clear off the mass of arrears and bring the work up to date.

For no apparent reason, the Air Ministry refused to allow me to use a rubber signature stamp for routine "stock" letters, and I was told that only my personal written signature as Commandant would be accepted by them. I thus had the unnecessary labour of signing my name many hundred times every night. As soon as my successor was appointed, this unusual restriction was removed, and she was allowed to use a stamp.

When the accumulation of arrears were dealt with, it came to light that most urgent matters had been allowed to stand over, or had been dealt with in an irregular, irresponsible, or unjust manner. As an example—a W.R.A.F. Immobile, member of the rank and file, had applied for compensation, having while on duty scalded her foot badly through no fault of her own. Mrs. Beatty had informed the applicant that the matter had been thoroughly investigated, and that no steps could be taken on her behalf, as she had no claim. Mrs. Beatty's letter was so curt and

unjust in tone, that an Officer in the Regular Army—attached to W.R.A.F. Headquarters, who had to deal with this matter at a later stage, remonstrated with her. She was then forced to admit that she had not made any enquiries, excusing the omission and her refusal to grant compensation on the ground that "those sort of people always want something." The claimant in this case was a married woman, with young children dependent on her work, and she was fully entitled to compensation. Mrs. Beatty never mentioned the matter to me, though the unjust decision she arrived at would necessarily reflect seriously on my administration.

On July 9th, Mrs. Beatty asked to see General Paine. Colonel Bersey and I were present at the interview. He took her letter of resignation point by point; she was forced to admit that her complaint that I had not allowed her sufficient staff was untrue, as she had four assistants and three half-time clerks. In dealing with Mrs. Beatty's grievance that I had acted "absolutely out of order from a Service point of view," in accepting a copy of the Handbook of the W.R.N.S. Regulations from an Officer who had been junior to Mrs. Beatty when the latter was in that Service, General Paine said that he considered the complaint a frivolous one, and that after many years in the Service, he failed to see any breach of Service rules. Mrs. Beatty told General Paine emphatically that "she was sorry for him," and when he informed her that she appeared to have no case for resignation, she left in a state of indignation.

On Saturday, July 13th, Dame K. Furse telephoned to say she wished to see me on important business. I accordingly gave her an appointment for the following day. As it was Sunday, I was alone in the Office at the time of her visit. I hardly knew Dame K. Furse, and I was very glad to have this opportunity of meeting her as, so far, I had only seen her at some large Conferences, where conversation was impossible. It never occurred to me that she was unfriendly, and I naturally took for granted that she and the Heads of other Corps would co-operate in every way for the good of the Service, as I

believed that they were all fully aware of each other's difficulties and efforts to overcome them.

Dame K. Furse asked me to explain why Mrs. Beatty had resigned. I told her that I was quite in the dark as to her real reasons, as Mrs. Beatty had denied that it was connected with my refusal to give senior posts to the five unsuitable ladies. I told Dame K. Furse that I had asked Mrs. Beatty to withdraw her resignation, but that she had declined to do so, and that she had assured General Paine and myself that she had no reasons except those stated in her letter, and that Lord Weir had himself decided to accept her resignation. To my surprise, Dame K. Furse said very significantly that I ought to know the reason, and she insisted that I must give her a report on Mrs. Beatty in writing. I again assured Dame K. Furse that I had no idea why Mrs. Beatty and the other Officers had resigned, and that I could only imagine that they had some private reason or difficulty of which I was unaware, and I asked Dame K. Furse to tell me if she had heard from Mrs. Beatty of any trouble which I could smooth away. I explained that I had suggested to these Officers that, for their own sakes, they should withdraw their resignations, as I felt that their action in deserting their posts in war-time would reflect most seriously on women's work and the women's Corps in general.

Needless to say, I treated Dame K. Furse with every civility, and I made every allowance for her unaccountable annoyance, by putting it down to the fact that she was evidently a great personal friend of Mrs. Beatty's.

I was quite unaware until after the House of Lords Inquiry, that Dame K. Furse had actually written to General Paine after this interview with me, to complain of my personal behaviour to her during the course of it (*see* pages 337-340).

The letter is as follows:—

Copy. "Women's Royal Naval Service,
15, Great Stanhope Street, W. 1.

Unofficial and Confidential. *17th July, 1918.*

Dear Sir Godfrey Paine,

Thanks for seeing me to-day.

I am *very* unhappy about Mrs. Beatty, who has a fine record behind her, and am absolutely convinced that she would not have taken the suicidal step she did take, if she had not felt, after some months' experience, that it was the only step she could take in the hope of rivetting attention on certain matters, and thus ultimately helping the W.R.A.F.

If she was subjected for weeks to behaviour similar to what I submitted to, at an interview with Miss Douglas-Pennant last Sunday, she must have been at the end of her patience.

Mrs. Beatty was always loyal, and never complained to me until the Friday before she resigned, after she had made up her own mind to do so.

I have not seen her statement or any correspondence which may have passed between her and the Commandant, W.R.A.F. The whole thing makes me miserable, because I know this has not been just a "woman's quarrel." Our one wish has been, and always will be, to help the W.R.A.F. to get started, and in no way to usurp power, but I know that we are going to be faced with very great difficulties in helping you now, and that all the good still possible on our part may not ensure success. In asking to see you this morning, I swallowed my pride and risked giving further evidence that I have ulterior motives in wishing to help.

You don't know me, and have no reason to think that I am not just an interfering outsider, but please try to believe that in offering to help the W.R.A.F. out of part of its present difficulties, we are thinking only of the continuity and efficiency of the work and the protection of the women.

I am dead keen to see the Women's Services come through the war with the finest possible reputation. If we can keep what were formerly R.N.A.S. Stations going with the women under proper control and suitable conditions until such time as the W.R.A.F. has actually begun to recruit, inspect, and administer, I hope we may have helped a little, and we shall be only too delighted to recommend all our Officers and Ratings, working with the R.A.F., to transfer to W.R.A.F. as soon as we are satisfied that there is actually machinery ready to take them over and look after them.

Yours sincerely,

(*Signed*) KATHERINE FURSE,
Director, W.R.N.S.

By Mrs. Beatty's wish, I have asked Lord Weir to see her. She did not feel that her interview with you really cleared the air at all.

Sir Godfrey Paine, M.G.P.,
R.A.F.,
Hotel Cecil, Strand."

General Paine replied as follows :—

Copy.

"Air Ministry,
Strand, W.C.
18th July, 1918.

Dear Dame Katherine Furse,

Thank you for your letter of the 17th July. I am very glad of having had the opportunity of seeing you yesterday.

With regard to Mrs. Beatty, I am extremely sorry she found it necessary to resign her post with the W.R.A.F. Whatever she felt with regard to the organisation and running of the W.R.A.F., she certainly never took any steps, as far as I know, to try and get the matter put right, but merely resigned, and when told that she would be required to carry on until such time as somebody could be found to relieve her, absented herself from the Office, and, as far as I know, never did anything further to assist in any way.

I am quite convinced that the lady who is now Commandant of the W.R.A.F. is extremely able and capable of making a success of that Force, provided she is supported loyally by her subordinates. The lady who has been appointed in Mrs. Beatty's place is, I trust, quite suitable and capable in every way, and I sincerely hope that the Women's Service, as regards the W.R,A.F., will be a success. I am quite certain that you are only too willing to help us in every way, and that you will continue to administer and provide for the late R.N.A.S. Stations until such time as the W.R.A.F. are in a position to take them over. I am sure it will materially assist us.

Of course, I am unable to say whether the Secretary of State will see Mrs. Beatty or not, but if she has no better explanation to offer him than she had me, she will get no change out of him.

Yours sincerely,

(*Signed*) GODFREY PAINE."

These letters were handed by General Paine to my solicitor during the House of Lords Inquiry, *but were not produced*, and I did not know of their existence until the Inquiry was concluded.

Unfortunately, as the interview Dame K. Furse refers to took place on Sunday, I was alone in the office during her visit and had no witness. I can, therefore, only deny her allegations and refer to those who have known me for years at work and at play, as to whether they can credit that I treated her discourteously. I received her as I always receive any visitor, and I remember laughingly

apologising for only being able to give her a kitchen chair, and I offered to roll up my coat as a cushion.

In Dame K. Furse's letter to General Paine, she refers to the experience of "some months" which led Mrs. Beatty to decide on the "suicidal step" of resignation. I had only been appointed Commandant a fortnight when Mrs. Beatty resigned, and I had only been six weeks altogether at the Air Ministry, including my month's "look round."

Why Mrs. Beatty's step was suicidal, it is difficult to appreciate, as Dame K. Furse offered her, and she accepted immediately, a post in the W.R.N.S.

In the same letter Dame K. Furse mentions her fear of being "now faced with great difficulties in helping the W.R.A.F." It is not easy to understand why the resignation of Mrs. Beatty should make it "difficult" for Dame K. Furse to co-operate with the W.R.A.F.

It seems incredible that an Officer from another Department should have taken these steps behind my back to discredit me with my Senior Officer, only a month after I became Commandant.

I had no idea until the publication of the White Paper at the end of May, 1919, that Dame K. Furse, before she wrote to General Paine, had also written to Lord Weir, begging him to see Mrs. Beatty "as she" (Mrs. Beatty)

> "is not satisfied that the reasons which led to her resignation are sufficiently appreciated, she is very desirous of explaining them to you personally."

Dame K. Furse described Mrs. Beatty as:

> "one of the most competent and trustworthy officers, a woman in whom I had the utmost confidence, and whose record proved that she would be a real help to the new Force.
>
> "I knew that the members of the W.R.N.S. would have more confidence in transferring to the W.R.A.F. if they knew that the officer they had looked to for guidance in my office was also transferring to the new Force."

Neither did I know at that time that when Mrs. Beatty transferred from the W.R.N.S., Dame K. Furse had written to recommend her personally, both to Lord Weir

and Colonel Bersey, describing her as "quite one of my best . . . someone for whom I have a great respect and admiration."

Dame Katherine Furse's strong recommendation of Mrs. Beatty is difficult to understand, in view of the fact that it transpired that the latter had been the cause of friction in several voluntary Corps, and had twice previously endeavoured to oust her Commandant on the grounds that the latter was unpopular and unsuitable. Mrs. Beatty had also been the subject of two Inquiries for alleged insubordination during the time she was an officer in another Corps. Questioned by my Counsel, Mrs. Beatty at first denied any recollection of the matter, on the ground that it took place so long ago, and "*Is such ancient history I had really rather forgotten it.*" My Counsel then read her the verdict, in which she and other officers were censured for insubordination and readiness to take offence at trivialities. Mrs. Beatty gave the Court to understand that she could not remember the circumstances. When reminded by my Counsel that the Inquiry in question, which resulted in her resignation being accepted, had taken place as recently as July, 1915, Mrs. Beatty was forced to admit: "*Well, I was one of the six*" (*see* pages 309-312).

It was only after Mrs. Beatty left that I realised that she had repeated these same tactics in the W.R.A.F., and that she and certain of her friends had given the Probationary Officers and others the impression that I was a dreadful woman, who had spies everywhere, and who treated people in the most unjust manner (*see* pages 216-219, 310).

CHAPTER VIII.

Schemes and Stratagems.

The true reason for the sudden resignations still remained a mystery. I was aware, however, like many others, that there had been considerable political dissatisfaction in certain quarters at the setting up of the Air Ministry, and the consequent transfer of large numbers of men and Q.M.A.A.C. and W.R.N.S. with their Units from the control of the Admiralty and War Office to the new permanent Force.

Though I was quite in the dark until the moment of my dismissal, it appears that at the time I became Commandant of this new Women's Force, it was common talk at W.R.N.S. H.Q. that the W.R.A.F. was not going to be allowed to succeed, as it would not be given the necessary machinery so to do.

Early in July, Dame K. Furse asked to see General Paine. Colonel Bersey and I were present. At this interview, Dame K. Furse suggested that, owing to our shortage of Officers, she should retain control of the women who had transferred to the W.R.A.F. when the Naval Air Stations came under the Air Ministry. These women had been given the option of transferring permanently up to July 1st, and a large number of W.R.N.S. Officers (21) and Ratings (900) had elected to join the W.R.A.F. on that date. The W.R.N.S., whose full strength was far below that of the Q.M.A.A.C. or W.R.A.F.,* was thus further reduced, owing to the transfer of the Naval Air Stations with their units to the Air Force. Owing to our shortage of Officers, I had particularly welcomed the transfer of W.R.N.S. Officers, as it was my intention to promote the more experienced and put them in charge of Areas and Stations which needed special attention, replacing them by suitable W.R.A.F. Officers, who, though less

* Full strength of the W.R.N.S., 6,392.

experienced, would be able to carry on in a Unit which was already in running order (*see* pages 350, 351).

In certain Stations, some of the Officers preferred to remain in the W.R.N.S., and as I had not yet been provided with accommodation to train the others urgently required to replace them, as well as to officer the whole of the W.R.A.F., I had been very glad to hear from Colonel Bersey of Dame K. Furse's offer, and was anxious that it should be accepted—never doubting but that it was made in all good faith.

It was agreed at this Conference with General Paine that no step should be taken until the Admiralty had communicated in writing with the Air Ministry, and until an agreement had been arrived at.

On July 13th, the Admiralty wrote to the Air Ministry setting out the suggestion, and Dame K. Furse came again on July 17th to see General Paine to discuss the matter. General Paine agreed with the proposal on the distinct understanding that :—

(1). As these W.R.N.S. had already transferred to the W.R.A.F. on July 1st and the Air Ministry was providing their pay, rations, and uniforms, they without question belonged to the W.R.A.F.

(2). That the arrangement provisionally agreed to was purely temporary and should anyhow come to an end on December 31st, 1919, and that we should take control of any individual station at any time when the W.R.A.F. had suitable officers available.

(3). That no action should be taken by either the W.R.N.S. or W.R.A.F. until the Admiralty offer had been laid before the Air Council and a decision arrived at.

Dame K. Furse read us a draft of the Orders (Advance Instructions No. 2) which she said she proposed to send out to the transferred W.R.N.S. Officers if the Air Ministry accepted the above offer. These Orders explained the temporary arrangement. As they were on the lines of our provisional agreement, General Paine concurred, and I made a little rough note that night of the Conference to help my memory (*see* pages 77-78).

General Paine suggested that questions concerning the welfare and discipline of these transferred Officers and rank and file should be temporarily dealt with by Dame K. Furse and myself, acting in conjunction. General Paine and I felt confident that we should shortly have a sufficient number of W.R.A.F. Officers available to take control, as though the Air Ministry had been unable to provide me with an adequate Training Hostel, I had just obtained, through the kindness of the L.C.C., the loan of their magnificent Training College and 5 hostels at Avery Hill, Eltham, during which time (end of July—September), it would enable me to train 300 Officers every three weeks.

Dame K. Furse seemed much disappointed, and, to my intense astonishment, suddenly asked General Paine whether he realised that I was the cause of the resignation of one of her most valuable Officers—Mrs. Beatty, and also that I had no Inspectors. General Paine demurred at this, and assured Dame K. Furse that we had some Inspectors, and that more would very shortly be appointed. Dame K. Furse then insisted on knowing who our Inspectors were. Feeling that every allowance must be made for Dame K. Furse's possible ignorance of official procedure, and for the evident annoyance she felt that her friend Mrs. Beatty's resignation had been accepted, I told her that a very valuable Officer, Mrs. Beckett, who had transferred from the W.R.N.S., had been appointed an Area Inspector. Dame K. Furse then told General Paine that I had appointed to a high post "a woman" she (Dame K. Furse) "had dismissed and turned down from the W.R.N.S." My astonishment was unbounded, as Mrs. Beckett had transferred with a most excellent record on paper from the W.R.N.S. In the Women's Services, all Officers who transfer with a good record from one Corps to the other are posted to a billet at the same grade and pay unless they are promoted. I had, therefore, posted Mrs. Beckett to the equivalent rank to that which she held in the W.R.N.S., and I could not have done otherwise (*see* pages 336-337).

Dame K. Furse insisted that Mrs. Beckett had been dismissed, and she seemed greatly to resent her appointment. I was quite in the dark as to the cause of her

evident annoyance; but as she was our guest at the moment, I wished to make matters smooth, and therefore suggested that there must be some little misunderstanding. To clear the matter up, I offered to send Dame K. Furse a copy of her report on Mrs. Beckett, which I had received from the W.R.N.S. before appointing her. Mrs. Beckett was a total stranger to me.

Soon after my return to the Office, Dame K. Furse telephoned to me and again insisted that she had dismissed Mrs. Beckett and that I had no right to post her as an Inspector. As an example of her unsuitability, Dame K. Furse assured me that a certain O.C. had declined to have Mrs. Beckett in his Area. I happened to have Mrs. Beckett's record on my desk, and I read an extract in which it was stated that the O.C. had requested that Mrs. Beckett should be posted to his Area, as he valued her services. Dame K. Furse still maintained that Mrs. Beckett was dismissed; I therefore sent her a copy of her report on Mrs. Beckett, and I wrote an official letter asking her whether her statement in General Paine's room was intended to cancel this report. Dame K. Furse replied that the testimonial had been written in the light of the Regulations, which lay down, to quote her words, that "while being fair to her prospective employer is to help the woman to secure employment."

Dame K. Furse's allegation that I had not only caused the resignation of one of her most valuable Officers, Mrs. Beatty, but had given a high post to a woman dismissed and turned down by the Admiralty reflected gravely on me, and General Paine might have taken a very serious view of such an apparent "job" on my part. I saw General Paine and assured him that Mrs. Beckett's appointment was in order, and he accepted my word. Later on, he told me that he had mentioned the matter to the Second Sea Lord—Dame K. Furse's Senior Officer—and he also told Lord Weir, during the course of an interview on July 23rd, at which I was present.

At a Conference on August 9th, I asked Dame K. Furse to tell me the exact position with regard to Mrs. Beckett. After some hesitation Dame K. Furse informed

me that she had not actually dismissed Mrs. Beckett, but that she had made her resign.

Mrs. Beckett's husband and two sons were all serving at the Front, and they felt strongly that the matter must be cleared up. Colonel Beckett, R.E. (now Brigadier-General Beckett), on his return from France, sent a lawyer's letter to Dame K. Furse, who then withdrew her statement in the following letter :—

Copy. "Women's Royal Naval Service,
15, Great Stanhope Street, W. 1.
November 13th, 1918.

Gentlemen,

I have received your letter of November 6th, with reference to the complaint made by Mrs. Beckett concerning a statement made by me in my capacity as Director of the W.R.N.S. at an official conference, at which Sir Godfrey Paine and Miss Douglas-Pennant were present, in connection with the organisation of the W.R.A.F.

I long ago informed Miss Douglas-Pennant, to whom I made the observation in question, that I had made a mistake in saying that Mrs. Beckett had been discharged from the W.R.N.S., and I am quite prepared to repeat this.

I fully and frankly withdraw any suggestion that Mrs. Beckett was dismissed from the W.R.N.S. and I regret that an inaccurate recollection at the moment led me to make the statement to which you refer.

Yours faithfully,

(*Signed*) KATHERINE FURSE,
Director, W.R.N.S.

Messrs. Charles Russell & Co.,
37, Norfolk Street,
Strand, W.C."

After the Conference on July 17th, Colonel Bersey had been instructed by General Paine to draft a reply to the Admiralty's letter, and he brought it to me for my concurrence. To my surprise, it was entirely contrary to General Paine's decision, having been drawn up in accordance with Dame K. Furse's wish that the transfer of the W.R.N.S. to the W.R.A.F. should be regarded as cancelled. I told Colonel Bersey that I could not agree to recommend the action he suggested, as it did not carry out General Paine's instructions, and the Air Ministry

would lose thereby the certainty of the services of a large number of Women Officers and rank and file, for whom they were already providing pay, rations, and uniforms. Another letter was drafted by Colonel Bersey and submitted to General Paine, and on July 24th, the Air Ministry wrote to accept the Admiralty's offer, but emphasised the stipulations General Paine had made (*see* page 72).

This arrangement should have worked smoothly, as I have already said. I welcomed it as a temporary measure to tide over a difficulty. Before any reply had been received from the Admiralty in answer to the Air Ministry's letter of July 24th, Dame K. Furse wrote a Minute to General Paine, which was at variance with the agreement arrived at. She pointed out that the transfer of the W.R.N.S to the W.R.A.F. (which had been completed on July 1st) must be regarded as cancelled, and that they should be allowed to decide afresh on January 1st, 1919, whether they wished to revert to the W.R.N.S. or remain with the W.R.A.F.

Dame K. Furse further insisted that she should have entire control of these Officers and rank and file, and be quite independent of the W.R.A.F., and that, instead of communicating with the Commandant, W.R.A.F., over any question that might arise, she should go direct to General Paine (Master-General of Personnel).

Dame K. Furse added that the matter was urgent, as she wished to issue an order to the W.R.N.S. Officers. It must be remembered that she had already shown General Paine and myself the draft of this suggested order (Advance Order No. 2) at our Conference on July 17th (*see* page 72).

It then came to our knowledge that Dame K. Furse had already issued instructions in spite of her statement to the contrary in the Minute just referred to, and in spite of the distinct understanding arrived at between her and General Paine and myself at our Conference on July 17th, that no orders should be issued by either the W.R.N.S. or the W.R.A.F. pending final agreement between the Admiralty and Air Council.

Our attention was drawn to the fact that these instructions did not set out our agreement, but were entirely at variance with it and were causing great confusion in the Air Force Stations. It transpired that before our Conference on July 17th, when that understanding was arrived at, Dame K. Furse had sent an urgent wire early in July to all W.R.N.S. Officers who had transferred to the W.R.A.F. saying that all Air Stations were to remain under the W.R.N.S. This telegram was followed by her Advance Instructions No. 2, dated July 8th, ten days before our Conference, in which she announced that the transfer of the W.R.N.S. who had joined the W.R.A.F. on July 1st was temporarily postponed, and that she was in sole control, and that all questions concerning the Women Officers and rank and file were to be referred direct to her. Dame K. Furse also laid down that she would inspect and approve all accommodation in these Air Force Stations, communicating direct regarding them with the Men's side of the Air Ministry and not with the W.R.A.F. As the Commandant, W.R.A.F., was held responsible by the Air Ministry for all women's accommodation, it seemed inconceivable that Dame K. Furse should decline to act in conjunction with her. It was impossible to account for her unreasonable attitude, as I was unaware of any grounds to justify it, beyond the fact that her friend, Mrs. Beatty, had resigned.

During the House of Lords Inquiry, a rough note of the Conference on July 17th, which I had jotted down to help my memory and for Office information, was produced by the Counsel for the Air Ministry (Mr. Rigby Smith), who endeavoured to prove that it was a Minute, and therefore evidence that Sir Godfrey Paine and I had agreed to the Temporary Instructions No. 2, *as issued* by Dame K. Furse, and he suggested that General Paine and I were in fact going back on the arrangement arrived at, and not Dame K. Furse and the Admiralty.

The Draft Temporary Instructions which formed the basis of our agreement at this Conference were quite different from those Dame K. Furse had already sent out without our knowledge. We never agreed to those she issued.

My rough note, which was by no means full and complete, made solely for my own personal guidance was as follows:—

> "July 17th, 1918. A Conference was held in the M.G.P.'s room, 12 o'clock. Present: Dame K. Furse, Miss Monkhouse, Colonel Bersey, the M.G.P., and Commandant, W.R.A.F. An agreement arrived at on the lines of the Temporary Instructions No. 2. It was decided to accept the Admiralty's offer up to January 1st, 1919, unless it was found convenient to take over any particular Station or Stations before that date. Commandant, W.R.A.F., specially asked that she should be informed of action, if any special cases arose *re* discipline. Dame K. Furse agreed.
>
> V. D. P."

In her evidence during the House of Lords Inquiry, Dame K. Furse said that she had a Conference with Colonel Bersey and myself on June 28th, at which she alleged that we agreed to her proposals. She also declared that Colonel Bersey and I had asked her to put the matter through privately, as official correspondence took time, and that she had, therefore, issued her instructions after showing them, she alleged, to both Colonel Bersey and myself, and obtaining our consent on July 1st. This was not the case so far as I was concerned. I did not see these instructions. I have already said that I had no knowledge of any such agreement, and I have no recollection of any meeting. I remember Colonel Bersey asking me casually whether I did not think that the W.R.A.F. and W.R.N.S. should amalgamate permanently (*see* page 52).

Even if Dame K. Furse and Colonel Bersey had arrived at this unauthorised agreement, it seems inconceivable that on July 17th Dame K. Furse should have allowed General Paine and myself to believe that no steps would be taken and no orders issued until the Air Ministry had consented. It seems equally inconceivable that Dame K. Furse should have believed that either Colonel Bersey or I could hand back to her the W.R.A.F. transferred from the W.R.N.S. without the knowledge of General Paine (the Master-General of Personnel) and the Air Council, and before the Admiralty had made any official suggestion.

In her evidence, Dame K. Furse also stated that on June 28th, after seeing Mrs. Beatty, who intended to resign, she suggested to Colonel Bersey and myself that she should appoint another W.R.N.S. Officer to take the place of Mrs. Beatty.

This interview referred to was apparently the one at which Dame K. Furse discussed her scheme with Colonel Bersey, and showed him the "Advance Instructions" she issued. Dame K. Furse had nothing to do with appointments to the W.R.A.F. If I had been present, as she stated in her evidence, and she had without any apparent reason suggested that Mrs. Beatty needed replacing, I would surely have made inquiries as to what gave rise to such an unexpected proposal, especially as I had no idea that Mrs. Beatty wished to resign, until she actually did so some days later, on July 1st.

On August 2nd, Dame K. Furse wrote a further letter to General Paine, again stipulating that she must have sole control of the women, and communicate direct with him instead of the Commandant, W.R.A.F., and that the transfer of the W.R.N.S. to the W.R.A.F. must be regarded as cancelled. General Paine replied on August 7th, disagreeing, and pointing out that, in his opinion, there were many details Dame K. Furse should discuss with the Commandant, W.R.A.F., "who," he added, "I am convinced is only too ready to co-operate in every way." Dame K. Furse replied on August 8th, to the effect that she declined to consent, and she complained in this letter to General Paine that I was not available on the 'phone when she rang up. In view of the vast amount of work outside the Office, and the women in 500 Camps to organise, it seemed hardly reasonable to expect me to be at the office telephone when rung up without warning. It must be remembered that I was at this time still quite in the dark as to any grounds for dispute or friction, as I only knew what I heard at the Conference on July 17th, that the Admiralty and Air Ministry were in correspondence, and that I should be given my instructions if and when the arrangement was agreed to by the Air Council.

On August 8th, Dame K. Furse asked me to come to a Conference at H.Q., W.R.N.S., to discuss certain details. In this letter she again clearly laid down that she intended to have entire control of all women in the Air Force Camps, who had transferred from the W.R.N.S. to the W.R.A.F., that they were to be entirely under her administration, and, further, that any recruits enrolled were to be regarded as W.R.N.S. who were under no obligation to become W.R.A.F.

At the Conference, which took place on the following day (August 9th), she assumed an incomprehensibly unfriendly attitude from the outset. Fortunately, on this occasion I was not alone, and can prove that I did everything possible to make things easy. Dame K. Furse insisted that I was the cause of the Air Ministry's delay in replying to the Admiralty, and that I had sent out unauthorised instructions to her W.R.N.S. Officers. She also reproached me, as she had already done in her letter of August 8th, with having broken faith by drafting W.R.A.F. recruits into these Stations without her permission. Lieut.-Colonel Williams, who was in charge of W.R.A.F. recruiting, under Colonel Bersey, was present, and denied any such action on the part of his Dept. I assured Dame K. Furse that we had done our best to facilitate matters, and that we had kept most strictly to the agreement arrived at on July 17th—that no step should be taken by the W.R.N.S. or W.R.A.F. pending the decision of the Admiralty and Air Council. As Dame K. Furse still persisted that I had issued instructions, I asked her to show me a copy, as I had never sanctioned any orders. This she was unable to do, but she made clear that, unless her conditions were accepted, the whole arrangement would come to an end.

The question which of us should be responsible for these transferred rank and file did not trouble me. I assumed that the Women's Corps were enrolled in order to help to win the war, in whatever way their services were most needed. If the Air Ministry thought fit to give the temporary control of these units to Dame K. Furse, it relieved me of certain responsibilities at a busy time.

Whether the work required was done by W.R.N.S. or W.R.A.F. or by W.R.A.F. under W.R.N.S. control for the time being, did not seem to me to matter, if it was satisfactorily accomplished.

My heavy duties from 8 a.m. till long after midnight left me no time to dwell on any of these unexpected experiences. I could only try to make things smooth, and see that the work did not break down. I was satisfied that, so far as my Staff and I were concerned, we had never given Dame K. Furse the slightest grounds for her unfriendly attitude. I did my best to ignore it during the Conference, but it was impossible to shut one's eyes to its existence.

I must again point out that I had no idea at this time that Dame K. Furse had written to General Paine to complain of me after her visit to me on July 14th, 1918, to enquire why Mrs. Beatty had resigned.

The House of Lords Select Committee nevertheless reported :—

> "The suggestion that Dame Katherine Furse was a party to any such intrigue as suggested, is not borne out by any evidence."

CHAPTER IX.

Undesirable Candidates.

Miss K. Andrew had returned from Scotland on July 7th, and informed me that she did not wish to withdraw her request to be allowed to resign, and she asked leave to go immediately.

Though I did not see much of Miss Andrew, on account of my work, I became aware that, though she had been given the responsible post of Assistant Commandant, she had very little knowledge of administration or even of Hostel organisation. She did not seem to realise that before accommodation could be obtained, or buildings erected, or any scheme carried out which involved expenditure of public money, the different departments concerned had to be consulted, particularly "Finance," and sanction obtained.

I did not realise at this time that Miss Andrew was entirely under the influence of Mrs. Beatty and Miss Pratt, and that she had written direct to Lord Weir from Scotland, to make grave complaints of me. I thought that she was merely an inexperienced girl, who had been given a post far too responsible for her capabilities, and that with training she would become a useful officer.

General Paine saw Miss Andrew and informed her that Lord Weir had decided that she was to remain for a month. She was much aggrieved, and from the White Paper, published long after my dismissal, and from the evidence in the House of Lords Inquiry, it appears that she wrote three times direct to Lord Weir, and that she obtained an interview with him. From Lord Weir's statement in the House of Lords (*see* pages 246-248), it is evident that she complained that I was incompetent and unfit for a responsible post.

I was never allowed to know that Miss Andrew was in direct communication with Lord Weir, regardless of the Regulations which lay down that all requests to Heads of Depts. for interviews and all correspondence must be sent through the Senior Officer, who, in his turn, is obliged to pass them on.

It appeared later that Miss Andrew was determined to obtain the post of Chief Recruiting Officer, and that she had greatly resented the fact that owing to her lack of experience and qualifications I had been unable to recommend her for such a responsible post (*see* page 247).

Miss Andrew was a young girl from Glasgow, who had been seven months in the Q.M.A.A.C. before she transferred to the W.R.A.F., and on the recommendation of Miss Pratt, she was appointed an Assistant Commandant. Previous to that she had been Secretary to a Women's Suffrage Committee in Newcastle, clerk to a small firm of toy makers, and, for a short time, a supervisor of the women employed by a private firm in Newcastle.

Whilst I was of opinion that she was too unreliable for a position of great responsibility, it seems that Lord Weir allowed himself to be influenced by this young woman to my detriment. This was the young Officer whose adverse opinion of me was quoted in the House of Lords by Lord Weir and Lord Londonderry as justification for my dismissal.

During the month that Miss Andrew was in the Office (from July 7th to August 19th), she made most serious mischief. I had hoped, but hoped in vain, that when Mrs. Beatty left she would have settled down satisfactorily.

Fresh efforts were again made to force me to appoint unsuitable women to responsible posts. Among others I was obliged to refuse to recommend a personal friend of Miss Andrew for the post of Area Superintendent for Scotland, as she had been badly reported on during her training, being referred to as one who "will not realise the necessity of discipline," and is "lacking in tone."

As I have already explained the post of Area Superintendent was a most responsible one, the Officer holding it was in charge of all the W.R.A.F. Hostels and Personnel in Scotland. The candidate declared that she had been definitely promised this post by a Labour Ministry official. There seems to have been some further irregularity in connection with this appointment, as the lady was admitted to the Probationary Officers' Training

Centre, without filling in the necessary Application Form (A.M. Form 5).

When I decided that I could not at present recommend her friend for that appointment, Miss Andrew burst into tears at the Office Committee, when the matter was under discussion, and afterwards reproached the Air Force Officer in charge of the Probationary Officers' Lectures, for his adverse report.

I offered the lady a less responsible post, for which, according to her qualifications, she was suited. This she declined, and it subsequently came to my knowledge, that Miss Andrew dictated a letter for her to write to Lord Weir, complaining of my unfairness. I had already seen her, and explained that she would receive promotion when her capabilities had proved that she was entitled to it. She, however insisted that she had a right to the post of Area Superintendent for Scotland, on account of the promise of the Labour Ministry official.

Lord Weir sent on her letter of complaint to General Paine for investigation, and the latter, on hearing my explanation, endorsed my opinion, but this caused great indignation.

The unsatisfactory and undesirable type of woman which had been passed by Miss Pratt, Mrs. Beatty, and Miss Andrew at the Officers' Selection Board (*see* page 55) in some cases gave me great trouble, as these candidates were now coming up for training, and their presence was keenly resented by some of the other Probationary Officers.

Though mistakes may be made in all good faith, it did not seem to me to be right that public money should be spent in giving three weeks' free board, lodging, training, and pay to women who were obviously unsuited for any post of responsibility.

A most unsatisfactory candidate passed by the Selection Board was brought into the W.R.A.F. by Miss Pratt and Mrs. Beatty. She had previously applied to the W.R.N.S., but was not appointed by them.

Her application form is marked "Special," in Miss Pratt's handwriting, and Mrs. Beatty's clerk made a

note on the file that the lady was "recommended by Mrs. Beatty and Miss Pratt."

This candidate appears to have been passed without going before the W.R.A.F. Medical Board.

She gave her permanent address as Saxmundham, and described herself as the daughter of a gentleman of independent means. This statement was untrue, as her father, who disowned her, is a respectable stallholder in an East London market.

Her reports were unsatisfactory during training, and as soon as I saw her I was convinced that she was quite unfit for any post. Miss Andrew was very much annoyed and disappointed at my decision. She assured me that Mrs. Beatty, Miss Pratt, herself, and many others, all thought most highly of this lady, as they knew her to be a splendid woman, who had done excellent war-work in Russia.

As the H.Q. Staff were unanimous as to her admirable qualifications, I consented to give her another examination, in order to test her thoroughly. Her conduct and reports were again unsatisfactory:—

"Uncontrolled manners—seems too young to realise the responsibilities of an Officer."

"Unintelligent—not fit for the position of Officer."

She was then informed that she had failed to qualify for the post of Officer.

This candidate proved to have a most unsatisfactory record, having been sent home from America after a term in a Rescue Home. She obtained a post overseas shortly before the House of Lords Inquiry and, owing to serious misbehaviour, was dismissed, and is unable in consequence to return to England.

The accusation that I dismissed people unjustly is untrue and without any foundation (*see* page 218). No Officers were dismissed by me during the time I was Commandant—the only members of the rank and file I dismissed were two Motor Transport Drivers, who were reported by the Police for soliciting at Victoria Station. I saw them at the request of their Senior Officer, and as both had been, as I was informed, well-known bad characters for some years, and were using the uniform when soliciting as a protection from the Police, I decided

to dismiss them. At the same time, I told them that if they wished to make a fresh start at any time, they could apply to me in my private capacity.

The allegation that I constantly "turned down qualified and suitable women" is equally unfounded. It is true that I felt unable to consent to make appointments in certain cases until I had referred to General Paine for instructions.

For instance, I was asked by an Officer from the Ministry of Munitions (Aircraft Department) to give permission to a civilian lady in his Section to wear the uniform and rank badges of a W.R.A.F. Officer. He told me that she was employed as a Secret Service Agent and that he wished to send her overseas, and that the W.R.A.F. uniform would enable her to go in and out of the camps and aerodromes without challenge. I explained that General Paine had told me that the Air Ministry had decided not to send any W.R.A.F. Officers or rank and file overseas at present, and that, therefore, anyone in W.R.A.F. uniform would arouse comment. Rightly or wrongly I did not feel that it was advisable to allow a young woman in W.R.A.F. uniform to travel about the Continent without any control from the Corps to which she apparently belonged, and, though I made no comment, I felt some surprise that the Secret Service Authorities did not arrange these matters direct with the Air Ministry rather than through subordinate officers in the Ministry of Munitions. I was assured that the matter was most urgent, so I referred it to General Paine, who, however, refused to sanction the appointment.

Soon afterwards I was asked to appoint another civilian lady who was engaged in photographic work, and whose Senior Officer desired that for the sake of convenience she should nominally become a W.R.A.F. Officer. I was informed that General Livingston and Colonel Bersey had already promised to appoint her.

My action in referring these special cases to General Paine seems to have caused resentment and to have given rise to the rumours that I was disobliging and difficult to work with, which perhaps influenced Mr. Winston Churchill when he accused me in his letter of May 24th, 1919, of causing obstruction (*see* page 229).

Another lady was highly recommended to me by Mrs. Beatty, Dame K. Furse, and certain Officers at W.R.N.S. Headquarters. I was urged to make her a W.R.A.F. Officer, being assured that I should find her most valuable for organising work at W.R.A.F. Headquarters. She was a friend of Mrs. Beatty, having been her Adjutant in another voluntary Corps, and later on was employed at the British Red Cross V.A.D. Headquarters, when Dame K. Furse was Commandant of that Section. Accepting the recommendation in all good faith, I took steps at once to secure the services of this lady. On taking up her references with the Red Cross, I was warned, however, by the present Commandant of that Association on no account to appoint her, in spite of her good abilities, as she was supposed to be of German nationality, and had lately changed her name to an unmistakably British one. I was informed that after Dame K. Furse and her friends left the Red Cross and joined the W.R.N.S., the lady in question was told by the Red Cross that she must resign owing to her nationality. She then applied for a post in the W.R.N.S., but the Admiralty for the same reason would not sanction her appointment. She was afterwards recommended to me under another name, and until I received this friendly warning from the Red Cross, I had no knowledge of the real circumstances.

The W.R.A.F. Regulations regarding Aliens were most stringent, and debarred even Allies* from appointment, they laid down :—

> "No woman (or a woman either of whose parents or whose husband is or has been at any time) of alien nationality may be accepted or enrolled."

I never alluded to this matter to Dame K. Furse or to the W.R.N.S., but after my dismissal, I found that my action in refusing to appoint the lady in question had caused great annoyance to certain Officers at W.R.N.S. Headquarters. It appeared that Dame K. Furse had sanctioned the appointment of a lady with an unmistakably German name to her personal Staff, after this lady had also changed her name. I was, therefore, regarded as being unduly scrupulous on this point.

* Certain exceptions were made with special permission.

CHAPTER X.

Intrigue and Intimidation.

As I was hard at work from morning till night with the men and women Officers who were keen to make the W.R.A.F. a success, I never suspected that Miss Andrew was disloyal, and that before and after she left the W.R.A.F. she was assisting Mrs. Beatty and others outside the W.R.A.F. to bring about my dismissal. During the House of Lords Inquiry it transpired that she and Mrs. Beatty had approached certain M.P's to raise an agitation.

At meetings held by Mrs. Beatty and Miss Andrew, attended by Miss Pratt, Mrs. Livingston Parry (Brig.-General Livingston's sister), Miss Taylor, and others, it was decided that questions should be asked in the House of Commons. Mr. Tyson Wilson, M.P., was approached, and on August 6th, 1918, he asked the following questions :—

> "To ask the Under-Secretary of State to the Air Ministry if he will state the previous experience of the Commandant of the Women's Royal Air Force, and the reasons for her appointment to the position.
>
> "To ask the Under-Secretary of State to the Air Ministry whether a Mr. Hayward is Assistant-Commandant of the Women's Royal Air Force—if so, is Mr. Hayward of military age, and whether Mr. Hayward was recently an insurance clerk in Cardiff, and obtained exemption from military service on the grounds of his then occupation.
>
> "To ask the Under-Secretary of State to the Air Ministry whether several of the Senior Officers of the Women's Royal Air Force have resigned since the present Commandant, the Deputy Commandant, and the Assistant Deputy Commandants were appointed—whether he is aware that at present there is a feeling of dissatisfaction in the Force with the present Commandant—and whether in view of this dissatisfaction, he will institute a full Inquiry into the causes."

The question regarding the Insurance clerk no doubt referred to the Registry expert whose services had been temporarily lent on a fortnightly basis, at Colonel Bersey's request, by the National Health Insurance Commission (Wales) to organise the Registry in his Office (*see* page 20).

Mr. Tyson Wilson's questions were replied to on behalf of the Air Ministry by the Parliamentary Secretary (Major Baird) :—

> "Two Senior Officers of the Women's Royal Air Force have resigned since the appointment of the present Commandant. The Air Council have every confidence in this lady's ability and discretion, and they see no need for an Inquiry of the nature suggested in the last part of the question.
>
> "Miss Douglas-Pennant has for more than six years been a member of the National Health Insurance Commission for Wales, and she had previously served as a co-opted member of the London Education Committee. She was appointed to her present position because her experience and qualifications rendered her, in the view of the Air Council, the most suitable person available to carry out the duties attaching to it."

I now became aware for the first time that, without doubt, urgent files and letters requiring my personal attention had been withheld from me, with the result that I was regarded by those who did not know me as an unjust and unsympathetic tyrant.

For instance, the day before Miss Andrew left, a W.R.A.F. Officer, Mrs. Atkin, asked to see me. As it was Sunday, I was, fortunately, alone in the Office, and she was, therefore, shown direct to my room. She was in great distress, and told me that she had left her post in the North without leave, in order to beg me to see her on an urgent matter. It appeared that she had a sick relation lately back from the Front, and she was urgently needed in London to keep house for him. She told me that a month earlier she had written to me, and marked the envelope and letter "Private and Confidential," as the contents were purely personal. After some delay, she received a formal reply, signed by Miss Andrew, to the effect that the matter would receive attention. Mrs. Atkin spent several weeks in great anxiety, and at last, in her despair at not being able to obtain any reply from me, she came up to H.Q. I assured her that I had never heard of her letter or request, and I at once made arrangements for her immediate transfer to London.

Another day, a Colonel Meadowes called to see me. Luckily, I was in when he came straight in to my room. Colonel Meadowes was in such a state of indignation, that

I thought he must be a shell-shock case. He refused to sit down, and told me that he had come to let me know what he thought of my cruel injustice, and that if I were "an officer and a gentleman," I would not behave like I did to those under my command.

I was amazed, and begged him to tell me what was wrong and who he was, as I was quite in the dark. He then told me that he had returned from the Front the day before, and had found his wife, a W.R.A.F. Officer, in great distress, as, according to her story, she had got into serious trouble with me, and that, as I had threatened her with dismissal, she was writing to ask permission to resign. Colonel Meadowes soon realised that I knew nothing whatever of the matter. His story was that the W.R.A.F., of whom his wife was in charge at the Depot, had threatened to strike on account of the lack of uniforms. The O.C. told her to notify me, hoping that I would come to speak to the women. She did so, and got no reply. The O.C. then made an appointment to see me with Mrs. Meadowes. I had no knowledge of this, and after waiting in vain to see me, they went to see Colonel Bersey; but I was not informed of their visit. The next day, Mrs. Meadowes received orders from Mrs. Andrews* to come to W.R.A.F. Headquarters. I was never informed of this. She was sent up to see Mrs. Andrews and Miss Andrew. She was then severely reprimanded by Mrs. Andrews for not being in W.R.A.F. uniform (none was available at the time), and told that I was so annoyed with her (Mrs. Meadowes) for having seen Colonel Bersey, that she would probably be dismissed. The unfortunate W.R.A.F. Officer then returned to her Depot in great agitation, and wrote out her resignation.

When Colonel Meadowes realised that I knew nothing whatever of this affair, he warned me that certain people at W.R.A.F. Headquarters were "letting me down" very badly by their rudeness and the messages and orders they gave on the telephone, purporting to be from me. He told me that he had intended to take the serious step of lodging a complaint against me for my

* Attached to W.R.A.F. H.Q.

unjust treatment of his wife. Fortunately, however, he met a General who knew me, and who said that he was sure that there must be some mistake, as I would never behave in the manner alleged, and he advised Colonel Meadowes to insist on seeing me personally.

Both Colonel and Mrs. Meadowes expressed their willingness and desire to give evidence at the House of Lords Inquiry; but as they were abroad at the time, they sent in a statement taken down by a Commissioner of Oaths at Gibraltar, where Colonel Meadowes was quartered. This document, which would have shown how I was misrepresented by certain disloyal W.R.A.F. Officers, was not produced at the Inquiry.

Soon after this, I was rung up by an O.C. at a Depot in London and asked why I had ordered all his women cooks and waitresses to be removed that afternoon, and he gave me plainly to understand that he could not tolerate such an unreasonable action. I could only assure him that I knew nothing of the matter, as I had only asked Colonel Bersey to send the Air Force Officer, Major Elwell, who dealt with these matters to adjust a small difficulty with the Messing Officer, and I had emphasised how particularly anxious I was not to do anything to hinder the work. This Officer told me that he had been ordered by Colonel Bersey to remove the women at Miss Andrew's request.

Even among the civilian clerks, over whom I had no jurisdiction and with whom I had no dealings, mischief seems to have been made.

A clerk in the Air Ministry rang me up on the 'phone and asked for an interview with me. I gave her one the same evening. Her business concerned a friend who wished to join the W.R.A.F. After discussing it, she astonished me by asking whether she might tell me the real reason for her visit. She then said that she had heard such terrible tales about me—that I was a cruel virago, who habitually used bad language, and that she had been warned against me not only by many Juniors but by the Superintendent in charge of the Women Civilian Clerks at the Air Ministry. (I had never met the Woman Superintendent in

question). My visitor told me that she had made up her mind to come and see for herself what I was like, as those who abused me had never met me, and she could not imagine why a woman who was said to be so disreputable had managed to get such a responsible post. She added that now she knew the truth, she was going away to contradict the lies spread (*see* page 457).

So far, I had not paid any attention to what I believed to be idle gossip. To those who have not experienced the utter lack of appreciation of the elements of discipline, straightforward dealing, and self-control among a certain type of men and women who succeeded in getting responsible posts in connection with the Munition Works, Women's Corps, and other organisations during the war, it will seem incredible that such things could have happened, or that such unprincipled people existed. Those, however, who had the misfortune to work with them, are aware that wherever these unscrupulous people succeeded in gaining a footing, they caused friction and unrest. By means of slander and misrepresentation, and by obtaining influence by backstair methods over certain high officials, they made every effort to oust those, above them or under them, who stood for straight dealing and honest methods in the public service.

They used their new positions to further the interests of themselves and their friends, and their unaccustomed authority to tyrannise over the gallant women of the rank and file, whose respect and confidence they could never win.

I hoped that as I had been able to bring in a reliable type of Senior Officer at Headquarters, and had promoted some excellent Officers already in the Corps, as soon as others could be provided to succeed them in the Hostels, the general tone of the W.R.A.F. would quickly improve, now that most of the mischief-makers had left.

I did not know, however, that, as the sequel will show, the same bad influences, which were busily at work to wreck the Corps from the outside, had the ear of Lord Weir and certain Heads of other Departments.

I have worked for many years among competent women who have sacrificed much to attain efficiency and experience by training, and I have the greatest appreciation of their devotion to their work, and their determination to uphold a high standard in their particular profession. In justice to them, I could not, for one moment, contemplate passing them over and giving preference to untrained and inexperienced women, whose only qualifications for high posts were that they had influential friends.

As soon as I became Commandant, I made clear to everyone concerned, that all posts would be open to those who had the necessary qualifications (provided a vacancy was available). I emphasised this point every time I addressed the Probationary Officers during their training, and I assured them that promotion would be on merit and merit alone, and that no amount of influence would weigh with me, as I did not care who people were, provided they had the necessary qualifications. In spite of this, untrue statements were spread to the effect that I did not intend to allow any one to obtain Senior posts unless they had worked up from the lowest grades or were my own personal friends.

In her evidence in the House of Lords Inquiry, Mrs. Beatty declared that I had refused to make any appointments except to the lowest grade. This was untrue, and she was forced to admit that she had never heard me say so, or seen any instructions to that effect in writing, or received them from me.

I can only refer to those who have worked with me for many years as to the probable truth of these mischievous allegations, and I feel confident that I have built up a reputation among my colleagues, for having, at any rate, endeavoured, during that time, in the Elementary, Technical and Trade Schools, Training Colleges, and Hospitals, in the Slums, and in the Government Depts., in which I was working, to see that all in each grade were allowed a chance to distinguish themselves, and that good material, often buried in obscurity, was brought to light.

I felt that it was incumbent on me to ensure that the splendid body of patriotic women under my care were given competent Officers they could look up to and rely upon. I realised fully the responsibilities I owed to the W.R.A.F. and to the parents who had sacrificed much and suffered many anxieties in parting with their daughters. I knew that they relied on me to see that the girls, often working under very trying conditions, were properly safeguarded, and treated with the respect to which they were entitled. I did not feel that it was consistent with my duty, or fair to them, to place the W.R.A.F. under the orders and at the mercy of women Officers whose only experience of life had been gained on the music-hall stage of an inferior type or "on the streets."

In spite of the shortage of trained women during the war, there were plenty available who were willing, from patriotic motives, to sacrifice good posts in order to join the W.R.A.F. (*see* page 98).

If the Air Ministry had allowed me adequate Training Accommodation, I should have had no difficulty in getting the W.R.A.F. quickly into working order or in complying with the Regulations that each candidate must undergo a period of training before appointment. When, to meet these difficulties, I had secured the L.C.C. Training College, in my private capacity, and was pouring out large numbers of Women Officers into the W.R.A.F., General Brancker succeeded General Paine, and I was summarily dismissed.

Though my refusal to appoint women of unsatisfactory character has been the indirect cause of my summary dismissal from the Service, and alleged "gross unpopularity," I do not for one moment regret the stand I have made. I feel convinced that every self-respecting man and woman would have done precisely the same in my place, and though it has cost me very dear, I should do exactly the same again in similar circumstances.

CHAPTER XI.

Obstruction.

The Air Ministry's decision that the W.R.A.F. should be entirely dependent on a Department (M.3) over which the Commandant had no control was a heavy handicap to efficient work. In the case of the Q.M.A.A.C. and the W.R.N.S. no such Department intervened—the Controller, Q.M.A.A.C., and the Director, W.R.N.S., had a free hand, and they were given every facility for recruiting and for training officers and rank and file.

The procedure which prevailed in the W.R.A.F. had been clearly laid down in an instruction signed by Colonel Bersey's Chief Staff Officer for the guidance of other Departments, dated 29th May, 1918, soon after I came to the Air Ministry:—

> "The functions of this Branch (M.3.) are mainly to administer the W.R.A.F., and, consequently, all dealings with other Branches must be made through us.
>
> (*Signed*) E. M. COCKBURN,
> S.O.1.M.3."

It will be plain to all that such an unbusinesslike and unworkable arrangement must inevitably lead to a breakdown, unless there was the closest co-operation between the two Departments, and why Lord Weir sanctioned the plan is incomprehensible.

As soon as General Paine was removed to another post and I was dismissed, the Commandant who succeeded me was allowed sole control, and the whole of the Men's Section (M.3) ceased to exist. These difficulties then ended, as General Brancker, who up to that time had controlled all Accommodation and Equipment, was able, when he took over General Paine's post of M.-G.P., to rely on his late Department for the provision of all necessary facilities.

Up to that date the apparently unnecessary delays made it impossible to shut one's eyes to the fact that some

unaccountable antagonism existed against General Paine's Department, of which the W.R.A.F. was a section.

As General Livingston and Colonel Bersey transacted all the arrangements with the Equipment Department, I had not so far had the opportunity of meeting General Brancker, the Director of Equipment (who had just returned after a few weeks' absence), his Deputy, Brigadier-General Fletcher, or any of his Staff. I had, however, often expressed the wish to do so, in the hope that it might lead to a better understanding with them.

In order to prevent difficulties with the Equipment Department, I asked General Paine to let me have the services of an Officer experienced in building and accommodation. I thought that it would facilitate matters if he inspected accommodation for me, and gave his expert opinion, which would be far more valuable than that of the Women Inspectors without practical knowledge, and I hoped that General Brancker's Department would find it more satisfactory to deal direct with him. General Paine consented, and an Officer with long experience of construction and engineering was attached to the W.R.A.F. Headquarters, but unfortunately this appointment caused resentment in certain quarters.

To enable me to get the W.R.A.F. quickly into order, I was determined to push forward the training of a good type of Officer. From what I saw of the splendid body of women who composed the rank and file, I felt confident that as soon as I was allowed to train and post a large number of competent Women Officers to supervise the women employed in the Camps, all would go well so far as the W.R.A.F. was concerned.

We were at the worst period of the man-power shortage.

Berridge House and the accommodation required for housing the women were available on May 30th, but the Equipment Department had so far not provided the necessary equipment to enable me to start training.

This delay was a serious set-back to General Paine's efforts, as Master-General of Personnel, to replace men wherever possible with women, and thus release the men so urgently needed for other duties.

There was a long list of very promising candidates—over three hundred—awaiting training for Officers' posts. Many of these had applied in response to personal letters which I had written to various Women's Organisations, as well as to the Heads of Training Colleges, Schools, and Associations dealing with women's work, telling them how anxious I was to secure the best possible type of Officer. The response had been very satisfactory.

Over 16,000 women applied during one week-end at W.R.A.F. H.Q. in reply to an advertisement for Officers, and many of them were passing through the Selection Board besides the 300 ready for training.

This unfailing supply of Officers does not appear to bear out the report so widely spread that Lady Rhondda advised my dismissal as it was alleged that I had such a bad name in the country no decent women would join the W.R.A.F. while it was known I was Commandant (*see* pages 217-220).

The lack of training accommodation was a great hardship to those who had already thrown up posts, believing after the urgent call from National Service to women to come forward that their services would be immediately required. I received numerous indignant letters from candidates and their parents complaining of the delay.

In spite of repeated appeals to Colonel Bersey, I could not get any furniture or equipment. He invariably assured me that it was available, and that I would receive it immediately, but it was not delivered until after my dismissal.

I was not aware until later that Colonel Bersey had not authorised the indents (*i.e.*, requisition lists, without which in the Service it is impossible to obtain any stores or equipment) until July 18th, though I had shown him the premises in Hampstead, available on

May 30th, and we were now at the beginning of August. Even if the Equipment Department had thought it inadvisable to recommend the Air Ministry to accept this particular accommodation, it was clear from the outset that equipment would be wanted for approximately twelve hundred W.R.A.F.'s wherever it was decided to accommodate them. It was common knowledge that in war-time after indents had been forwarded, at least six weeks usually elapsed before delivery.

If M.3 had authorised Captain Cherry to send the indents forward to the Equipment when he (Captain Cherry) suggested doing so, early in June—the Training Scheme could easily have been started by the middle of July. It would have been possible for me to train 150 Women Officers there every three weeks, as well as 1,000 rank and file, who were immediately required for special work. As I have already said, these unaccountable delays necessitated our opening a Training Centre for W.R.A.F. Officers temporarily at Avery Hill, Eltham, and fresh and avoidable expenses were thus incurred.

Apart from the saving of man-power, the prompt setting up of this Training Centre would have been an economy, as the whole of the large College—Berridge House—though available, stood empty during June, July, and August, in spite of the fact that it had been taken over, and was being paid for by the Air Ministry. I never, however, obtained the use of it during the whole time I was Commandant, owing to the equipment and accommodation being withheld.

I have felt it necessary to give these facts in detail, as Lord Wrenbury's Report quotes at length the Minutes *re* Berridge House, and censures me for making, what their Lordships allege to be groundless statements (*see* pages 276, 277).

When M.3 at length authorised the Indents, on July 18th, I was informed that the Equipment Department could not let us have the furniture until the beginning of September, more than three months after I had applied for it.

About this time I met, in General Paine's room, Brigadier-General Fletcher, Director of Air Quarter-Master General Services, under General Brancker. I had never seen him before. I, therefore, welcomed the opportunity of getting into direct touch with him, General Paine asked him why there were such delays over W.R.A.F. Clothing, Accommodation, and Equipment. General Fletcher declared that the delay in the delivery of Equipment was due to the fact that I had neglected to send in the Indents. I explained that I had no power to forward Indents, as that matter came under Colonel Bersey's Department, and that I had asked him (Colonel Bersey) to make the necessary arrangements on June 1st, and that he had then assured me that the Equipment was available.

With regard to the accommodation, General Fletcher stated it had been impossible to take over the houses I had mentioned in my training scheme. He alleged that they were unsuitable and full of dry rot, and that I had been mistaken in thinking that a large Training College which I had suggested (Hackney College) was available. General Fletcher assured General Paine that he had found far more suitable premises, and that his Department had notified me, but that so far I had not inspected them, and that he was only waiting for me to approve them. This was the first I had heard of the matter, and to avoid further delay it was arranged that I should go over these new premises that afternoon with General Fletcher's Deputy. Long after the appointed time, two Officers arrived, who informed me that they had no houses to show me over, and they suggested that I should accompany them to Hampstead to try to find accommodation. They endeavoured to persuade me to give up the Berridge House Training Scheme. I assured them that this was impossible, as it had been passed early in June by General Paine, and I had his orders to get it going as quickly as possible. I heard nothing further for a fortnight; then General Fletcher informed General Paine that he had found most suitable premises, and I was again asked to inspect them. *They proved to be, with one exception, precisely the same houses that I had*

originally suggested in the scheme which I sent forward on June 1st, and also included Hackney College (*see* pages 16-18).

The question may well be asked why these houses selected by me at the end of May, and thereupon declared to be "unsuitable and full of dry rot," were thus found to be eminently suitable at a later date when recommended by someone else.

General Fletcher's assurance to General Paine that my neglect to furnish the necessary Indents had caused the delay in the delivery of equipment confirms my statement that the Indents had not been sent in by Colonel Bersey until July 18th, instead of on June 1st when I requested him to do so, and he declared that the equipment was available.

On the first day of the House of Lords Inquiry, the Chairman (Lord Wrenbury) and certain members of the Court, in a discussion with my Counsel, took the view that I had acted in an irregular manner, when informing Colonel Bersey that Berridge House was available, and in asking him to pass on the information to the Equipment Department.

> "Earl of Denbigh: M.3. [Colonel Bersey's Department] was to select the premises, and Miss Douglas-Pennant was to say whether or not they were suitable. . . . . If she did not get what she wanted, she had the right to go straight to M.-G.P. [General Paine] and to complain.
>
> .....
>
> "Chairman: Neither was it for her to suggest to M.3. what they were to obtain. It is simply as you opened it, that they [Colonel Bersey and M.3.] were to order it, and she was to determine as to its suitability.
>
> "Earl of Denbigh: Or make suggestions as to its suitability.
>
> "Chairman: Yes."

My Counsel explained the circumstances fully, viz., that as a late Member of the London County Council Education Committee, I knew from private sources that Berridge House Domestic Economy Centre might be secured if the Air Ministry wished to apply for the use of it. Further, that before sending in the Training Scheme

which General Paine had instructed me to frame, I felt bound to make certain that there was sufficient accommodation available in the neighbourhood to house 1,200 W.R.A.F's.

After hearing this explanation, Lord Wrenbury replied :—

> "Chairman: I should have thought that as you stated it, that would be, so to speak, taking upon herself the duties of M.3. and trying to override M.3. [Colonel Bersey] with M.-G.P. [*i.e.*, with General Paine].
>
> "Mr. Hawke: I think not. If I may continue, she suggests to M.-G.P., and M.-G.P. agreed that it was a fine scheme. She mentions it to Bersey, and it is for him to go to Q.7. [Equipment Department] and arrange for the obtaining of these premises.
>
> "Chairman: No. It is for him to say 'I have not provided this, and I do not think this a proper place to provide.' He could say—'I am very much obliged to you for your advice, but I do not agree with you.'
>
> "Mr. Hawke: **As a matter of fact, in this particular case she took him with her.**"

I joined the W.R.A.F. at one of the worst moments of the war, and I took it for granted that we were all intended to help to the best of our power in every possible way. I should have felt that I was failing in my duty if I had withheld valuable information regarding available accommodation at a time when it was urgently needed. It, therefore, did not occur to me that any exception could be taken to my mentioning to my colleagues and Liaison Officer that this highly suitable accommodation was at our disposal.

CHAPTER XII.

Progress.

I tried to treat all these unaccountable obstructions as if they were merely "fortunes of war," and I did my utmost to prevent friction, and at the same time to push on the work. I was, however, in a serious predicament. Unless I was allowed a Training Hostel, it was impossible for me to comply with the Regulations and give the Probationary Officers the three weeks' training to which they were entitled before they finally agreed to serve when accepted. Seeing that everything depended on our training more Officers and rank and file in order that the release of available men by the replacement of women might be carried out, I felt it was my duty to take every possible step to bring this about.

If it had been within my power I should have taken a house at my own expense and offered it to the Air Ministry for the public service; but I was not in a position to do so. Determined that the W.R.A.F. should not fail to meet the urgent demands made on it, I wrote with General Paine's consent to various Education Authorities in the country, asking them for the loan of a Training College during vacation time, as I thought I might train a large number—say 600 women—during the eleven weeks of the holidays. I have already mentioned Avery Hill; but as I have been blamed for taking steps to secure it, I take the opportunity of stating the facts.

Having been for some years a member of the London County Council Education Committee, and Chairman of one of the Council's Training Colleges for Women Teachers, I went again to see the Education Officer, Sir Robert Blair, and besought his help. To my relief, the London County Council most generously consented to lend Avery Hill Training College, Eltham, during vacation time. This College,* furnished and fully equipped, held 300 students, and consisted of five Hostels, a large central college with a gymnasium, drill-hall, picture-gallery, etc.,

* Formerly the residence of the late Col. North.

standing in a big garden and park—an ideal place for Probationary Officers. It was not available until August 2nd. General Paine seemed very much pleased, and I was informed that the Air Ministry had decided to accept the London County Council's offer. I set to work to get a good Training Scheme started, and selected the most promising Officers to take charge of the Hostels. Difficulties soon began to arise between the Equipment Department and the London County Council Authorities, and fearing they would lead to further delay, I asked the London County Council Representative, with General Paine's consent, to accept my personal pledge that we would return the buildings to them on the date specified in as good a condition as we received them—plus cleaning (*see* pages 172, 173). The London County Council representative accepted my promise, and we were thus able to start our first Training Course on August 2nd. It was a most encouraging success. The Probationary Officers, who were a fine lot, thoroughly enjoyed their three weeks' training. The W.R.A.F. Administrator and Staff and the Air Force Instructors attached to the Training Staff, worked enthusiastically to make it successful.

I arranged every detail of the Course, and hoped to improve each successive Course on the experience gained by previous ones, with a view to getting a first-rate intensive Training Scheme started. Owing to the kindness of former colleagues and fellow-workers, who gave their services, it was possible to arrange for supplementary lectures on Health, Discipline, Morale, Recreation, etc. Having been for many years one of the promoters of musical drill, gymnastics, fencing, swimming, field clubs, and every form of recreative competition in the Schools and Boys' and Girls' Clubs, I did my utmost to encourage recreation, and, realising the difficulties likely to arise in remote Stations, far from places of amusement, I arranged for lectures on how to get up impromptu entertainments and sports for winter evenings or wet weather.

I felt hopeful that the training was getting on to satisfactory lines. The Course ended with a most successful entertainment, given by the Probationary Officers—a Concert, and dance, and a play written by

some of them, to which I was invited, and there was no doubt that they were all starting on their new life full of enthusiasm.

I was much cheered at the feeling of mutual confidence and goodwill which was beginning to spring up in the Corps among the newly-appointed Officers, and at Headquarters, W.R.A.F. Officers and rank and file were keen about their work, and a fine, healthy spirit prevailed.

In order to meet the needs in the Areas, I was also able to start two Depot Hostels at Birmingham for the accommodation of the rank and file who had just joined, pending their being drafted to Stations. I began to make arrangements for the opening of other Depot Hostels in London, and at Bristol, Glasgow, York, Salisbury, and Dublin. At the same time, I was preparing a Training Scheme for the opening in September of Berridge House, Hampstead, when I hoped that, at last, the special training for one thousand rank and file would commence, as well as for the Probationary Officers, who would be moved there when the loan of Avery Hill expired.

General Paine, in his evidence before the House of Lords Inquiry, makes it clear that he was fully aware of the difficulties in obtaining the necessary accommodation, both for training Officers and for housing the women required to replace the men in the Air Force Camps.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: Soon after the 11th of June did Miss Pennant discuss with you again the question of accommodation and shortage of officers?

"General Paine: Oh, yes.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: . . . . . Were those two subjects constantly discussed between you?

"General Paine: Yes, and I was constantly urging her to get more officers to administer the large number of women that were being enrolled. We were being pressed almost daily by the Government to substitute women for men. We were also expanding the Air Force at a very rapid rate, and we were enlarging the establishments for training [Air Force Cadets] all over the country, and it was essential that we should get Women Officers to look after the large number of women that were required to be used in substitution for the men.

.....

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: And in discussing this question of accommodation did Miss Douglas-Pennant then or a little later

suggest that she might get a Training College from the Educational Authorities?

"General Paine: Yes.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: Was that her suggestion?

"General Paine: It was entirely her suggestion, and she made all the arrangements, and got this College at Avery Hill, and started a large number of women there under a course of instruction to become officers.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: We know the course of instruction did not commence until the 29th July.

"General Paine: No, because the place was not available. It belonged to some London Educational Establishment, and the pupils had not gone out until the end of July.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: Did her action in that matter have your approval?

"General Paine: Entirely.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: Did it have the approval of Lord Weir?

"General Paine: I think it did. I told him about it, and I am quite sure he approved."

The evidence of Mr. W. G. Hayward and Captain J. P. Cherry, M.C., shows the state of disorder with which I had to contend.

Mr. Hayward was a 1st class clerk (Civil Service) and Establishment officer, National Health Insurance Commission, Wales. It will be remembered that his temporary presence at W.R.A.F. Headquarters to put the registry on a proper footing at Colonel Bersey's request was keenly resented by Mrs. Beatty, Miss Pratt, and Miss Andrew, and was the subject of questions in the House of Commons on August 7th, 1918 (*see* page 88).

Captain Cherry was an Officer with many years' service and expert experience, and his help proved invaluable.

During the Inquiry the Chairman (Lord Wrenbury) declared that reference to the disorganisation in the office was unnecessary as the Air Ministry admitted that it was defective. In consequence, further corroborative evidence was not given, and one witness, Mr. G. L. Whittaker (Civil Service), was not called, although he was in Court. His statement to my solicitor was as follows:—

"I joined the Air Force in September, 1917, and about the 10th July, 1918, I was drafted to the W.R.A.F. under

Lieut.-Colonel Bersey. From the 10th July until the beginning of September, after Miss Douglas-Pennant had been dismissed I was attached solely to W.M.3.

"When I arrived Mr. Hayward had started work for about three days. I found an enormous amount of disorganisation, as regards the papers and office accumulations of arrears. By the time I left, however, to go over to M.3, the whole of the arrears had been disposed, except with regard to all the papers relating to the transfer of the women from other Women's Corps.

"Whilst I was there in the office, I was in daily touch with the various members of the Staff. I had opportunities of seeing the way that Miss Douglas-Pennant had dealt with them. She was invariably courteous and considerate, and I never heard one single word of complaint from any member of her Staff with regard to Miss Douglas-Pennant's conduct towards them, and I myself received nothing but consideration at her hands.

"The only exception was with regard to Mrs. Andrews and Miss Andrew, and I could not fail to notice, from a very early date, that they were not endeavouring to work in harmony with the Commandant. I was left unmistakably with this impression whenever I came into touch with them."

Lord Wrenbury pointed out that it was my duty to get matters straight, and to quote his words in the Report:—

"For the very reason that this state of things existed, Miss Douglas-Pennant was appointed. Her task was to get things into order."

Lord Wrenbury then enumerates certain details, showing the lack of organisation, such as accommodation, training centres, officers, lists of camps and hostels, as well as an unsatisfactory system of filing and registering of documents which existed before I became Commandant. Their Lordships do not appear to have appreciated that the organisation of the sections of the office dealing with the matters specified were under the control of M.3, and that I had no jurisdiction over them whatever. Neither do their Lordships seem to have realised the enormous difficulties of getting into immediate order a Force scattered in more than five hundred Air Force Camps over the whole of the United Kingdom. The fact that this large force had been allowed to run for many weeks before my appointment without any practical attempt at organisation, had caused an accumulation of arrears of

work which was a heavy handicap. If the Headquarters Office could have been closed for a few days, it would have been possible to take stock and wipe out those arrears—but the torrent of urgent work which flowed in daily and hourly had to be dealt with promptly, and it was only possible to attack the arrears at night, when Mr. Hayward, Mr. Whittaker, and I worked until the early hours of each morning.

From the Report it is clear that their Lordships did not recollect that with the best will in the world, our efforts would necessarily be greatly crippled by the lack of accommodation, equipment, furniture, and uniforms, indispensable to enable me to build up the W.R.A.F. These efforts were further hampered by the Air Ministry's refusal to allow me the services of a clerk, and until shortly before my dismissal I had no adequate clerical assistance for confidential work or suitable office furniture and means of transport.

Under Lord Wrenbury's ruling, I was not permitted to show that it was entirely due to the obstacles placed in my path, which are referred to in the evidence of Captain Cherry and Mr. Hayward, that I was prevented from getting the work for which I was responsible into complete order. I submit, however, that during the ten weeks I was Commandant in the W.R.A.F. I initiated and started the Training and other schemes; trained 480 Officers; opened two large Depot Hostels in the Midlands; took steps to ensure that all W.R.A.F. rank and file became insured for medical treatment; organised the Headquarter Office in my Department; wiped off all arrears, and left the work up-to-date for my successor to carry on (*see* page 173). I was only able to accomplish this owing to the enthusiastic help I received from my Staff, of whose devotion to duty, loyalty, and confidence I cannot speak highly enough, and further, I owed much to the kind assistance of certain Air Force Officers, who took the keenest interest in the W.R.A.F. and gave me all the help in their power.

CHAPTER XIII.

The Recruiting System.

Six weeks had now elapsed since I took over the command of the W.R.A.F. Miss Andrew and the disloyal Officers had left the Office. So far as my own Department was concerned, the friendliest relations existed between the Staff and myself. The Departments at the Air Ministry with which I was in personal touch—the Disciplinary Section, Directorate of Training, Medical Department, and General Paine's Staff—were giving me every possible help. But for the withholding of accommodation and equipment the W.R.A.F. would soon have been an efficient Corps.

The question of increasing the strength of the W.R.A.F. was daily becoming more urgent. We were at the most acute period of the war, and to quote from General Paine's evidence "*it was life and death to us. We did not get enough men. We were short all over the country.*" It will be remembered (*see* page 11) that he had informed me that we should probably have to recruit up to a total of about ninety thousand women, in order, effectively, to release men for other work.

I was aware before I became Commandant that the arrangements for recruiting had caused a good deal of friction between the Ministry of National Service (Sir A. Geddes' Department) and the Ministry of Labour. Lady Rhondda was Head of the Women's Branch of National Service and a friend of Dame K. Furse.

I was officially informed when I took over, that owing to the fact that National Service had no machinery available, and the Women's Branch was shortly going to be closed down, it was definitely decided that the Labour Ministry should recruit for the various Women's Corps, through the medium of its Employment Exchanges.

On June 24th, I had received a letter from Dame K. Furse, in which she expressed herself as—

> "Very dissatisfied at present with the whole system of obtaining women for our Services. We are, so to speak,

the guests of the Q.M.A.A.C. Boards, which is not very satisfactory."

.....

"we have always hoped that the Ministry of National Service would take over the recruiting, but owing, perhaps, to inter-departmental difficulties, this seems still to be in the dim future. I feel sure that if you and we combine, we shall be able to keep important, as this is absolutely necessary if we are to obtain the right type of women."

Colonel Bersey had informed me that Lady Rhondda was very anxious that the W.R.A.F. should recruit through her Department—National Service—and he asked for my views. I told him that, in my opinion, such an arrangement would be impracticable at this stage, as office accommodation was very limited, and it would entail the setting up, at great expense throughout the country, of Recruiting Exchanges under National Service—when under existing arrangements, the Ministry of Labour already covered the ground and had the necessary machinery available in their Employment Exchanges.

Colonel Bersey apparently entirely agreed, and he told me the question had been decided some months earlier by the Air Ministry in favour of the Ministry of Labour.

Shortly afterwards, Lady Rhondda, whom I hardly knew, came to see me, and asked me to arrange for the W.R.A.F. to recruit through her Department (National Service), and to press for the setting up of joint Selection and Medical Boards for all the Corps—also under National Service. She gave me to understand that, as the W.R.N.S. were very dissatisfied with the Labour Ministry, if the W.R.A.F. would also refuse to recruit through them, the matter could be arranged, as the Q.M.A.A.C. were only waiting to see what the W.R.A.F. decided.

I felt sure at the time that Lady Rhondda was mistaken as to the attitude of the Q.M.A.A.C., as Colonel Bersey had assured me that the Q.M.A.A.C. had decided to recruit through the Labour Exchanges. Colonel Bersey was present during part of the interview with Lady Rhondda, and we promised to ascertain the Air Ministry's views and let her know.

I saw Lady Rhondda a few days later. I then told her that I was informed that the Air Council had definitely decided months before I became Commandant to recruit —like the other Women's Services—through the Labour Ministry, and that it was not considered advisable to reopen the question, and I expressed my regret at not being able to help her in the matter.

Willing as I was to assist Lady Rhondda and Dame K. Furse in every possible way, I did not feel it was my duty in war-time to try to upset arrangements which had been decided on by my superiors long before I arrived. It seemed to me that my work lay in the direction of trying to make the existing procedure run smoothly and I never gave the matter another thought. In view of this, I was astounded when Mr. Winston Churchill, in the House of Commons, on March 13th, 1919, announced that my dismissal was not due to any inefficiency, but that Sir Auckland Geddes was aware that there was obviously such serious friction with his Dept. (National Service), that he and Lord Weir decided that, in the interests of the W.R.A.F., I must go. Sir Auckland Geddes, who was present, nodded his acquiescence at Mr. Churchill's amazing statement (*see* pages 209, 210).

As I had never seen Sir Auckland Geddes, and the W.R.A.F. never had any dealings—official or otherwise—with National Service, beyond what I took to be a friendly interview, when Lady Rhondda came to see me, it was evident that Sir Auckland Geddes had been seriously misinformed.

As there appeared to be some overlapping between Colonel Bersey's Staff and the Ministry of Labour, for which I, as Commandant was held responsible by the latter, I discussed the difficulties with Colonel Bersey, and he seemed to welcome my suggestion that we should ask General Paine to invite the Ministry of Labour to appoint a Liaison Officer to assist with Recruiting for the W.R.A.F. General Paine agreed, and in consultation with the Head of the Labour Exchanges, a Mr. Williams was attached to Colonel Bersey's Staff with the rank of

Lieut.-Colonel, on the clear understanding that he was to be solely responsible for recruiting under Colonel Bersey. That this arrangement was quite definite is shown by the following extract from a Minute written by General Paine to the Head of the Labour Employment Exchanges Department :—

"Lieut.-Colonel Bersey saw Major Williams yesterday, who has agreed to assist with recruiting. He will be attached to M.3. Department (*i.e.*, Colonel Bersey's Department) for this purpose, and you should deal with him direct on all matters concerning recruiting, he in turn keeping in close touch with Miss Pennant and Colonel Bersey.

(*Signed*) G. M. PAINE,
M.-G.P.
[Master-General of Personnel].

12.7.18."

and by an extract from a letter from Lieut.-Colonel Williams to me :—

"I am quite prepared to come and assist to the best of my ability on the following understanding :—

"1. **That I have a complete and definite responsibility for the recruiting and propaganda side.**

"2. That I am granted a Commission as Lieut.-Colonel forthwith.

"Will you take my stipulations as quite *definite*.

(*Signed*) R. WILLIAMS.

9.7.18."

In spite of this arrangement the Air Ministry, in the House of Lords Inquiry, tried to show that certain breakdowns in recruiting arrangements, which were not part of my duties, were a proof of my alleged lack of administrative ability.

The following extract from Colonel Williams' Report on the recruiting position bears out my statement: —

"I realise every day more clearly the enormous difficulties with which the Department has had to contend. The possibilities of recruitment are limited by certain definite factors :—

"(*a.*) A proper complement of trained Officers (*see* pages 10, 11).

"(*b.*) The necessary uniform and equipment (*see* pages 11-13).

"(*c.*) Adequate Depot and Training Hostel Accommodation and Staff (*see* pages 14-18).

"(*d.*) Adequate Hostel Accommodation Staff in the Units (*see* page 120).

"(*e.*) Adequate number of Medical and Selection Boards.

"(*f.*) The publication of revised F.S. Pub. 14 (*see* pages 113, 288-290).

"With respect to (*a*), I understand that there are plenty of candidates for Officers' positions, but that there is only very limited accommodation for training them. The Commandant informs me that she is pressing for further training accommodation, and **the need of this is urgent and imperative.** To provide recruits before there is a sufficiency of trained Officers to deal with them, is only putting the cart before the horse. Besides, before any recruiting campaign is arranged, I should certainly require a number of Officers detailed for this special purpose in each area.

"(*b.*) I know nothing about the equipment position, but I think that **recruiting will be very much handicapped until such time as the new uniform is issued.**

"The Ministry of Labour is undoubtedly hung up for the want of authoritative regulations dealing with the enrolment of Mobiles. This, I understand, is approved, and I would urge that they be issued at the earliest moment. The Ministry of Labour cannot recruit if they have not got our official instructions as to conditions, etc."

Lack of Accommodation, Equipment, and Uniforms, and the absence of any sort of accurate lists of Hostels and other necessary information, were the true cause of the difficulties with which we were confronted. The fact that the Air Ministry and Ministry of Labour had so far neglected to arrive at a definite arrangement with the War Office, regarding the medical inspection of candidates, was another serious drawback.

Every Officer and member of the rank and file had to be medically examined before joining.

Before I became Commandant, it had been agreed between the War Office and the Air Ministry that, owing to the shortage of Doctors during war-time, the Medical Boards set up by the War Office to examine Q.M.A.A.C. should also deal temporarily with W.R.A.F. recruits.

The question of the Medical Boards became an acute one about this time, as Colonel Bersey received a notice from the War Office on August 6th, 1918, informing him that the existing arrangements for the medical inspection

of the W.R.A.F. recruits would come to an end within a few days (August 10th, 1918).

In view of the limited number of doctors available and our coming recruiting campaign, this sudden and unexpected withdrawal of assistance on the part of the War Office was a very anxious matter, and seemed incomprehensible at the time.

Owing to my having been one of the National Health Insurance Commissioners, which body were responsible for releasing doctors to serve in the Navy and Army, and, at the same time, for retaining a sufficient number to attend to the civilian population, I was aware of the possibilities and difficulties of forming Medical Boards in war-time. With General Paine's permission, and in consultation with the Air Ministry Medical Department, I immediately asked my late Insurance colleagues to help us to form our own Medical Boards, and they willingly agreed.

With the assistance of the Insurance Commissioners and the British Medical Association, a scheme was at once prepared to meet this emergency.

In a letter to the Head of the Labour Ministry Employment Exchanges, General Paine refers to this question—

> "To revert to recruiting, the present arrangement as to using the Q.M.A.A.C. Selection and Medical Boards is an informal one, the War Office being unable to agree to our using them officially. If, however, you can make definite arrangements for the use of these Boards, supplemented by one of your Officers, it will materially strengthen the position, and enable candidates to be called to Boards with less delay."

It will be seen that the delay in issuing the revised Regulations (F.S. Pub. 14) was causing great inconvenience to the Ministry of Labour as well as to all concerned in the administration of the W.R.A.F., as they contained details of work and rates of pay in the various categories in which women were employed. There is no doubt that the delay in issuing this information was a serious obstacle to recruiting of the rank and file. It will be remembered that during my first month's "look round" General Paine gave instructions to Colonel Bersey that these Regulations were to be immediately

revised and reissued by July 1st. On July 12th, 1918, General Paine, in a letter to the Labour Ministry Official mentioned above, writes:—

> "The revised F.S. Pub. 14, dealing with the constitution generally of the W.R.A.F., is now in full draft, and will be going to the printers for proof on Monday morning. We may, therefore, expect to have this ready in about a fortnight."

If the W.R.A.F. Regulations (F.S. Pub. 14) were "in full draft," as General Paine was assured on July 12th, it is difficult to understand why, in view of the great urgency, they were held up until he was moved to another department, and I was dismissed.

I have been repeatedly blamed and held responsible for this unaccountable delay, though I had nothing to do with the matter. The true cause of this hindrance, which had such serious consequences for me, only came to light many months later (*see* pages 288-290).

On July 23rd, General Paine read me a letter which Lord Weir had received from the Minister of Labour, complaining of the inadequate arrangements for recruiting in the W.R.A.F. and of the bad conditions in certain Air Force Camps where W.R.A.F. were employed.

I told General Paine that I was uneasy about the state of affairs in certain Air Force Camps, and that I had discussed the matter with Colonel Bersey, who was responsible, in conjunction with the Labour Ministry, for the recruiting of the W.R.A.F. rank and file.

After going fully into the points raised, General Paine read me his draft reply, and told me he felt sure that the arrangements I was making for training and posting out competent Women Officers would ensure better conditions in the Camps, and the welfare of the W.R.A.F. recruits. He then took me to see Lord Weir. Major Baird (Parliamentary Secretary), now Sir J. Baird, whom I had not met before, was also present.

General Paine explained to Lord Weir that I was not responsible for the recruiting of the rank and file, as it was undertaken by the Ministry of Labour and Colonel Bersey's Department, and that I only became

responsible when the Women Recruits had been enrolled through the Employment Exchanges. I told Lord Weir about the shortage of Women Officers, and that so far, in spite of repeated requests, the Air Ministry had been unable to provide me with adequate accommodation, though I had over three hundred promising women actually awaiting training, and many thousand applications. I informed him that I had been forced to borrow temporarily a Training College from the London County Council during the vacation time, and that we could not have the use of it until August 2nd.

I told Lord Weir that large numbers of women were constantly being drafted into Air Force Camps without my knowledge, and that as Commandant of these women, I could not accept responsibility for the consequences, if this was allowed to continue. I begged him to put a stop to this, as it was necessary to get the already existing accommodation and personnel into order, and I assured him that if I were given the necessary facilities and power, I should quickly be able to mend matters.

Lord Weir and General Paine decided that the Recruiting Campaign for Mobile Members (*i.e.*, women living in Hostels) must be postponed until October 1st, in order to enable the Equipment Department to provide the necessary accommodation and make it possible for me to open the Depot Hostels where the Mobile Women were sent for a week before being posted to a Station.

Lord Weir declared that he was quite satisfied with my efforts—that I was right to concentrate on training Officers, and he thanked me for having secured Berridge House and the loan of Avery Hill.

Lord Weir then read General Paine's draft reply to the Labour Minister, which he agreed to. This was the second and last time that I saw Lord Weir before my summary dismissal. He gave no indication whatever that he had any misgivings as to my work or capabilities during the six weeks I had then been Commandant. That he fully appreciated the fact that there was a serious lack of accommodation for training Officers is shown in his reply to the Labour Minister. It will be noted that

Lord Weir, in the last paragraph of his letter, which I did not see in full until the correspondence was produced by the Air Ministry in the House of Lords Inquiry, states that I had been appointed Commandant "about three months ago." This was not the case, as it will be remembered I came to the Office on "a month's look round" on May 13th, and I accepted the appointment of Commandant, W.R.A.F., on June 16th, 1918, and Lord Weir's letter is dated July 31st, 1918.

Copy. "*31st July, 1918.*

"Dear Mr. Roberts,

"Thank you for your letter of the 20th July, which I have been unable to answer before as I have been away in France.

"I, too, have been much concerned with the difficulties which have arisen in connection with the W.R.A.F., and General Paine, the Master-General of Personnel, has been devoting much of his time to the same question. I have shown him your letter, and he desires to make the following comments:

"With reference to—

"(1.) It is quite true at the moment that the W.R.A.F. have not sufficient Officers to carry out selection and enrolment of women, and this is being done on our behalf by the Ministry of Labour.

"Steps have already been taken to provide, in the near future, Officers for this work, and it is hoped that we shall soon be in a position to take this over from the Ministry of Labour.

"(2.) A new F.S. publication is in course of preparation, and it is hoped to have it issued shortly. Official instructions are also being drawn up, and should be issued in the course of a few days for guidance in recruiting.

"In addition, there is a small pamphlet being issued, giving the conditions under which mobile W.R.A.F. can be recruited.

"(3.) With regard to disquieting reports, undoubtedly the discipline prevailing in some W.R.A.F. commands is not all that can be desired, but until we get the right type of Officers to look after the various units, it is quite impossible that certain slackness and lack of discipline can be properly tackled.

"We have been seriously handicapped for lack of accommodation for training Women Officers, but steps have now been taken whereby it is hoped to train several hundreds during the course of the next few months.

"In conclusion, he wishes to point out that the Q.M.A.A.C. and W.R.N.S. have been going concerns for quite a considerable time, and have no doubt collected quite a large staff of capable Officers. The W.R.A.F. have not yet been in existence three months, and he has every reason to believe that, in the course

of the next few months, the W.R.A.F. will compare most favourably in regard to administration and discipline with the other two Services.

"For myself, I can only say that I am watching the progress of the Force with close attention, and I cannot pretend to be at all satisfied with the existing state of things.

"As you are aware, the existing Commandant, Miss Pennant, was only appointed about three months ago. I think, therefore, it would be unfair to expect marked improvement before now, but I think I might rightfully expect the results of her work to begin to show themselves from henceforward, if she is to justify her appointment.

"Yours sincerely,

"George H. Roberts, Esq., (*Signed*) WEIR.
Ministry of Labour,
Montagu House,
Whitehall, S.W."

During the House of Lords Inquiry, the Counsel for the Air Ministry endeavoured to prove that I was responsible for recruiting, and therefore to blame for serious deficiencies, and that the reassuring letter sent by Lord Weir in reply to the Labour Ministry's criticisms, had been drawn up by me, and was misleading.

I had never seen or heard of either the Labour Ministry's letter or the draft of the reply from the Air Ministry, signed by Lord Weir, until they were read to me by General Paine on the morning of our interview with Lord Weir.

General Paine, in his evidence before the House of Lords Inquiry, corroborates my statement :—

"Chairman [Lord Wrenbury] (To the Witness): You were inspired by somebody, were you?

"General Paine: We discussed it, and it is my reply. I was responsible. Miss Douglas-Pennant was not responsible for the letter, nor was Colonel Bersey. I wrote the letter, and gave it to Lord Weir.

"Chairman: It is your letter?

"General Paine: Yes.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: I take it that while you were discussing Mr. Roberts' letter with Miss Douglas-Pennant, you went very fully into the matters dealt with in that letter?

"General Paine: Undoubtedly.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: Did you, from anything you learned during that discussion, either from Miss Douglas-Pennant or from Colonel Bersey, come to the conclusion that Miss Douglas-Pennant was in any way to blame for the state of things complained of?

"General Paine: Oh, no; on the contrary, she was doing everything she could to get things right. I have always said so.

.....

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: Was the position generally discussed in some detail between Lord Weir and Miss Douglas-Pennant?

"General Paine: Yes.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: And did Lord Weir express to Miss Douglas-Pennant then, or at any subsequent date, any dissatisfaction as to the way things were going, so far as Miss Douglas-Pennant was concerned?

"General Paine: No, not by name.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: Nor by office?

"General Paine: No.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: Did he complain in any way of Miss Douglas-Pennant personally, or of Miss Douglas-Pennant as Commandant?

"General Paine: No.

"Chairman: Or of the way the work was going?

"General Paine: No, my Lord."

In reply to a question from the Air Ministry Counsel regarding my duties, General Paine made quite clear that recruiting for the W.R.A.F was not one of them :—

"Mr. Rigby Swift: She was under you in supreme control of the women in the Force?

"General Paine: Of the women's welfare, discipline, etc., **not the recruiting.**"

Shortly after the interview with Lord Weir, General Paine rang me up on the telephone to tell me that he and others were very much pleased with the progress of my work and efforts. Believing that I had won the confidence of my Chiefs, and encouraged by the thought, I was determined not to lose heart. I realised fully how necessary it was to do everything to avoid friction, as certain people who had not met me were only too ready to believe that I was an ignorant Jack-in-Office, riding rough-shod over other people's arrangements. To obviate this, I tried to get into friendly touch not only with the other Departments at the Air Ministry, but with the Labour Ministry, on which the W.R.A.F. was dependent for recruits. I also impressed upon my Staff the great importance of courtesy in all our dealings, and that they must refrain most particularly from criticising other Departments.

CHAPTER XIV.

Camps, Clothing, and Contracts.

Now that I was able to send W.R.A.F. Officers to take charge of Hostels, I began to hear something of the bad state of affairs which prevailed in certain Air Force Camps where the discipline was slack.

It must be remembered that under Air Force Regulations the women working in Camps were entirely under the command of the O.C. of the Camp—the W.R.A.F. Officer reported all minor offences and he dealt with them. In serious cases the O.C. reported to his Senior Officer—*i.e.*, the General Officer Commanding at Area Headquarters, who, if he considered it necessary, in his turn passed the case on to W.R.A.F. Headquarters for discharge, or, if less serious, dealt with it from the Area.

In the case of rumours of irregularities which reached me from the outside from time to time, I could only, in the first instance, ask Colonel Bersey, who was my sole channel of communication with the Air Force Officers concerned, to sift and verify them. If I had been given any facts to go upon and the case proved to be a serious one, I should have reported it immediately to General Paine. So far, however, Colonel Bersey had invariably assured me that there was nothing in these rumours, and as I began to have grave doubts as to the accuracy of this statement, I did not feel that I could any longer be held responsible. When Colonel Bersey and I were drawing up the scheme for Office Organisation (*see* pages 28, 29) he and his immediate Superior Officer, Colonel Ebben, Director of Manning, had taken exception to my insisting that discharges of W.R.A.F. for misconduct must be referred to the Commandant. Colonel Ebben, a temporary Officer whom I had never had the opportunity of meeting, and Colonel Bersey wanted to deal with those cases direct and themselves decide whether they should or should not be reported and recommended to the Air Ministry for discharge. Without wishing to reflect on any individual, it did not seem to me to be sound policy that the Woman

Commandant who was held responsible for the W.R.A.F. should be kept in the dark on matters which often involved delicate questions and required experienced handling.

If I had agreed to the line of procedure laid down by Brig.-General Guy Livingston's Department it would have followed that Colonel Bersey, or any Junior Officer to whom he happened to delegate his work, would have the power, acting in conjunction with the O.C. or Adjutant of the Air Force Station where the case of misconduct occurred, to suppress it, if they considered it desirable, or, on the other hand, to dismiss, without inquiry, someone who, if the case had been properly investigated, might have been found to have been treated with injustice.

General Paine concurred in my view, without any hesitation, and I arranged with the Head of the Disciplinary Section to advise me on any legal points that might arise in such cases. The matter then worked smoothly, so far as the W.R.A.F. were concerned ; but I found that my action in claiming that I must safeguard and be responsible for the women entrusted to me, gave great offence to M.3 Department, and I soon became aware that I should have difficulty in ascertaining the true facts of the cases which arose (*see* pages 392-394).

Early in August I heard from private sources that a large number of women were working at an Air Force Stores Depot under the Equipment Department in the country without any supervision, and that disgraceful scenes of rioting had occurred. People in the neighbourhood were so scandalised that I received a generous offer from one of them—Lady Wantage—to pay for a welfare-worker, rather than allow the state of affairs to continue. I made enquiries immediately and found that over 1,800 women were employed in a Camp of which I had never been told. I sent off a Woman Officer at once, and arranged for five more to follow. A few days later, the O.C. telephoned to say that a serious strike had broken out and that he could not deal with it. I said that I would go down at once. There had been a fight at the gates, and the O.C. had turned the hose on the women strikers to disperse

them. I found the women very indignant and that they had serious grievances. When they signed on, they had been promised a bonus by the Labour Exchange if their work was satisfactory at the end of a month. Only a few girls, however, who were alleged to be favourites of certain Air Force Officers, had been given the bonus. This question had reached a crisis as the Air Ministry had just received Treasury sanction to grant extra pay to clerks and typists. These women were, therefore, the source of jealousy to their less fortunate fellow-workers, who were not only in receipt of much less pay but had no prospect of a rise, and, further, had not received the bonus promised them on enrolment.

The lack of uniforms was also causing great hardship and expense to the girls. They had to come in by train, and after working all day in their own clothes, saturated with oil and grease, they returned often wet through, without any chance of being able to change.

A most unjust system of favouritism seemed to prevail—it appeared from the evidence of reliable witnesses that in most cases only girls who had friends among certain of the men Officers could hope for promotion or even justice. When I first appeared and climbed on to a barrack-table in the hangar, the girls—who were infuriated at having had the hose turned on to them that morning—all tried to shout their grievances at once. I asked for spokeswomen—everyone wished to be one. I, therefore, picked out six of the best-looking, best-dressed, and most prosperous-looking girls in the hangar, and asked them to come up on the table and tell me why they had not got their bonus. Without exception, as I expected, they all said they had secured it—but that they thought it a shame that so-and-so (pointing to other girls) who had worked far longer and just as well, had not got it too. These girls acted as splendid advocates for their less fortunate fellow W.R.A.F's. I found the 1,800 girls most reasonable—we discussed the whole question of their grievances, and when they roundly abused an Air Force Officer for breaking faith with them, I invited him to come up on to the table, so that he might have an opportunity of

hearing what was said, and of refuting it. The Officer in question said he must clear up the matter under dispute on the telephone with the Employment Exchange, and promised to return, but he never did.

We discussed the whole question of the grievances, and I promised that if the women would return to work immediately, and release some girls who, having got the bonus, had taken refuge in a neighbouring hangar to escape from their indignant fellow-workers, I would lay the matter before the Air Ministry and return in ten days' time to tell them the decision.

The behaviour of the girls to me was absolutely friendly and straightforward. I found that they had no idea that they belonged to a Force which numbered many thousands. When I explained their position and responsibilities, they saw at once the necessity of their Unit keeping up the credit of the Corps. The meeting ended most cheerfully, and they tried to carry me round the hangar, assuring me that they would do their best to make the W.R.A.F. " a bit of all right."

It was impossible not to be struck with the lack of hospitality and ordinary courtesy on the part of some of the Air Force Temporary Officers. I had made a very early start—when the strike was over they all went off to lunch. I should have been thankful for even a glass of water after a strenuous time ; but as the Hotels were not allowed to provide meals between hours, I did not get any food until late in the afternoon, on my way back to London to keep an evening appointment at the Training College, Avery Hill, Eltham.

It was satisfactory, however, to hear that the O.C. of that Camp telephoned the next day to say that " since the Commandant's visit, all the girls have been in exceedingly good humour, and everything is going very well. The women have kept their pledges."

It was quite evident that the lack of uniforms was going to cause further serious trouble and friction in many other Camps. We were just beginning to get a few uniforms delivered in two's and three's by the firm to whom the Clothing Contract had been given. The distribution of

such a small number after many weeks' delay caused jealousy among the women, who resented the fact that only a few fortunate members received them. The whole matter concerning uniforms seemed to be unaccountably delayed, and the explanations given me by Colonel Bersey on behalf of the Equipment Department, did not suggest any hope of improvement.

As I have already explained (*see* page 12) I had chosen the material and design of the uniforms a few days after I became Commandant. Later, however, I was assured on many occasions by Major Cockburn (Colonel Bersey's representative) that each successive pattern of cloth I had selected was unavailable. I was, therefore, obliged to accept for the uniforms a material which, rightly or wrongly, I did not consider equally suitable or practical for the purpose.

When the first sample uniforms were shown me by the firm to whom the contract had been given, the cut of these garments was not up to standard. At the request of the Head of the firm I sent the W.R.A.F. Clothing Controller (Miss O'Sullivan), a woman with sixteen years' experience of the clothing trade, up to his factory in the North to try to facilitate matters. On her return she told me that she was doubtful as to the possibility of a quick and satisfactory delivery as she was dissatisfied with the method of cutting out the uniforms, and it appeared that the firm in question were macintosh makers who had never made women's coats and skirts before.

I discussed the clothing difficulties with Colonel Bersey, and I asked him if my Department was in any way responsible for the placing of contracts. Colonel Bersey assured me that it was the duty of the Equipment Department to make the arrangements in conjunction with the War Office Contracts Department known as D.C.4. He made clear that I had nothing to do with the matter until the completed uniforms were forwarded by the firm to the W.R.A.F. Clothing Depot for inspection, prior to their acceptance and issue. I was relieved to hear that I could in no way be held responsible for the fact that the whole of this large contract for W.R.A.F.

Uniforms and Overcoats had been placed with this firm who, it appeared later, also provided the cloth from their own mills without any other tender being invited.

When I became Commandant I was informed that after I had chosen the pattern for the women's uniforms a sample would be "sealed" with a label signed by me to show that this particular pattern was the authorised one, and any firm who obtained a contract for making W.R.A.F. uniforms would have to produce similar garments up to the standard of the pattern "sealed."

I told Colonel Bersey that the Clothing Controller had reported to me that she had pointed out to the firm that the reason the sample uniforms were unsatisfactory was due to the fact that they were cut on the "bias," which, though saving, she alleged, a considerable amount of cloth over and above the amount allowed for by the Government contract would not permit the uniforms to be turned out in a workmanlike manner as would be the case if they were cut on the straight in the ordinary way.

I also told Colonel Bersey that if we put the inspection of uniforms on to a satisfactory footing under the Clothing Controller we should then be certain that the uniforms forwarded by the firm were up to the standard of the "sealed" sample, and our share of the responsibility would be safeguarded. I made clear at the same time that I had no reason to doubt that the firm would in future deliver properly cut garments, but if on the other hand they did not do so it would be the duty of the W.R.A.F. Clothing Inspection Department to refuse any unsatisfactory garment. Colonel Bersey agreed, but later events showed that the criticisms of the Clothing Controller were deeply resented.

Soon afterwards Colonel Bersey brought an officer from the Equipment Department to see me—Temporary Lieut.-Colonel O. W. Latimer (late Private in the Infantry). I had never met Colonel Latimer before, and was glad to have the opportunity of getting into touch with the Equipment Department. He told me that he felt it was advisable that the inspection of the W.R.A.F.

Clothing should be taken over by the Equipment Department. Though anxious to meet Colonel Latimer's wishes as far as possible, in view of the serious and unaccountable delays we had already experienced in connection with the supply of accommodation and equipment as well as uniforms, I did not feel justified in consenting, without General Paine's authority, to hand over to the Equipment Department an important part of the duties for which I was held responsible. I felt that it was necessary to safeguard my Department from being involved in the blame for the mistakes and delays which caused great inconvenience. For instance, large consignments of men's boots instead of women's boots had been delivered, and 10,000 embroidered badges for W.R.A.F. Motor Transport Drivers had been ordered through the Equipment Department at a moment when they were at a premium, though I had never asked for them, and they were not required. Anxious as I was to make every possible allowance for mistakes due to war-time pressure and to the inexperience of the Officers concerned in these matters, I felt that taking into account the vast sums of money wasted in reckless and unnecessary expenditure, it was my duty as the officer responsible for W.R.A.F. clothing to safeguard the public purse to the best of my ability. In my interview with Colonel Bersey and Colonel Latimer I assured the latter that I welcomed his co-operation to enable me to get the W.R.A.F. properly clothed as expeditiously as possible, and I suggested a scheme for the inspection of uniforms which I hoped would prove satisfactory to both Departments. Colonel Bersey and Colonel Latimer seemed to appreciate my wish to facilitate matters, and we soon arrived at what Colonel Latimer assured me he considered a most satisfactory arrangement, as it enabled the Equipment Department to have a representative at the inspection and gave them the right to throw out any garments he objected to. Colonel Latimer thanked me for my help and assistance. This was the first time I had come into personal touch with a Senior Officer from the Equipment Department. In view of this friendly interview, which was admitted by Colonel Latimer in his evidence at the Air Ministry

Clothing Inquiry to have been most cordial, it was all the more unaccountable that when General Brancker, the late Head of the Equipment Department, and himself a total stranger, dismissed me, he gave as his reason that "no one can do any work while you are about the place."

Before the conference with Colonel Latimer broke up it was agreed that I should give instructions to the Clothing Controller to start the inspection of clothing on the lines just decided on. I did so immediately, and Colonel Bersey promised to ask Colonel Latimer to put the agreed scheme down on paper so that the Head of each Department concerned might sign their concurrence, and the whole matter would thus be in order.

Colonel Bersey then told me that Colonel Latimer had complained to him that when he (Colonel Latimer) called at the Clothing Depot the Clothing Controller had behaved in a most insolent and violent manner, and had actually threatened to throw him out of the window. Colonel Bersey added that Colonel Latimer was so good-natured he did not wish any official notice to be taken of his complaint. It seemed incredible that the Clothing Controller, a responsible woman, should have behaved in such an inconceivable manner. When questioned by me later she was astounded at the suggestion of such a scene, and denied any knowledge of it.

I, therefore, thought it best to treat the matter as an official misunderstanding. The Clothing Controller explained later that Colonel Latimer had called at the Clothing Depot to persuade her not to object to his Department doing the inspection of this particular contract on the understanding, she alleged, that she would not be interfered with afterwards.

A few days after the conference with Colonel Latimer, Colonel Bersey brought a file into my room which he said was the Clothing file, and asked me to sign my agreement to the scheme he said was now on paper, and which he assured me was quite all right. I said I would like to read it through. Colonel Bersey again informed me that it was "quite all right," and

asked me to let him have the file back at once as Colonel Latimer wanted it urgently. I again told Colonel Bersey that I would prefer to read through the agreement, and that I would send back the file in a few minutes by the car in which I was just starting out to keep an appointment. When I read the agreement I found that it was entirely different to the one we had arrived at two days previously, as it handed over the inspection of W.R.A.F. clothing to the Equipment Department, which I had no authority from General Paine to do.

In view of the urgent necessity impressed upon me by Colonel Bersey for the immediate return of the file it seems difficult to understand why he should have held it up for several days. From the file it appears that Colonel Latimer had sent it to him on August 2nd, and that Colonel Bersey had written the following Minute to me on 6th August:—

Copy.

"Commandant.

"Please see Minute 12. The arrangement proposed will, we think, prove satisfactory, and overcome any question *re* inspection.

"(*Signed*) W. C. BERSEY,

"Lieut.-Colonel.

"6th August 1918."

The file containing this Minute, however, was not passed on to me until 9th August, when Colonel Bersey himself brought it up to my room just as I was leaving to keep an appointment.

I met Colonel Bersey later in the day, and, on his asking me if I had signed my concurrence, I told him I had been unable to do so as the scheme was not on the lines we agreed. He admitted that it differed somewhat, but gave me to understand that no steps would be taken until we could rediscuss the matter on his return from a week's leave which he was about to take.

The same afternoon I visited the Clothing Depot to inform the Clothing Controller that the arrangements for the inspection of clothing were temporarily postponed. To my astonishment I found her in a state of indignation,

and the Depot in great confusion. It appeared that some days previously the Equipment Department had sent an officer to take over the inspection of clothing on a written authority signed by Colonel Bersey, and dated before our conference with Colonel Latimer. In spite of the man-power shortage 40 men from a Labour Battalion had been brought in, and were endeavouring to learn the work which could have been easily accomplished by 12 women. The state of confusion at the Clothing Depot may well be imagined as the men were obviously unaccustomed to handling women's clothing and had no idea of the necessity for care and cleanliness in dealing with easily soiled goods.

As I was held responsible by General Paine for the W.R.A.F. Clothing Department, and would have to explain why I had apparently handed it over without his authority to another Department, I wrote the following Minute to Colonel Bersey in reply to his :—

Copy.

" Colonel Bersey,

" This seems to be an entirely different arrangement to the one agreed upon between Colonel Latimer, yourself, and myself, on 27.7.18, which you mention in your minute of that date. This file seems to be somewhat belated. I understand that the arrangement set out in Colonel Latimer's Minute has been started some days ago without my knowledge. As I have seen the Clothing Controller after the agreement arrived at on the 27.7.18, and explained what her duties would be, I do not feel it is conducive to discipline to have the whole arrangement altered without my being consulted, especially as I am responsible for the Clothing Controller's Department.

" (*Signed*) V. DOUGLAS-PENNANT,

" 9.8.18. " Commandant."

Colonel Bersey before he went on a week's leave replied to the effect that he had no knowledge whatever of the action of the Equipment Department. The following is an extract from his Minute, dated 10.8.18 :—

" The arrangement proposed in Minute 12 is certainly not altogether on the lines discussed at the interview with Colonel Latimer, but as stated in Minute 13, it suggests an arrangement which we think will avoid the possibility of any difficulty arising with the Clothing Controller.

"As far as we are concerned the arrangement has not been agreed. You will note that we have not yet replied to the Minute, having first referred the matter to you. If the arrangement is in force, as you state, it is entirely without our knowledge or concurrence.

" (*Signed*) W. C. BERSEY,

" M.3. " Lieut.-Colonel.

" 10.8.18."

Shortly afterwards General Paine asked me why the W.R.A.F. were not in uniform, and he sent for Brig.-General Fletcher (General Brancker's Second-in-Command, Equipment Department) to find out why there was so much delay over clothing, equipment, and accommodation for the W.R.A.F. I was present at the interview, and as I had never met General Fletcher before I was glad of the opportunity of getting into direct touch with him. I was much surprised to hear General Fletcher assure General Paine that the delay in providing uniform was due to the Clothing Controller, who he alleged, was reported to be obstructive and abusive, and he declared that she had received orders to throw Colonel Latimer out of the window if he again visited the Clothing Depot. As the Clothing Controller could only have received these instructions from me, I was amazed to hear such an extraordinary allegation reported to my senior officer, and I laughingly repudiated any such action on my part, and my conviction that the Clothing Controller must have been misunderstood. It was at this same interview that General Fletcher informed General Paine that the delay in providing W.R.A.F. accommodation and equipment was due to the fact that I had neglected to send in Indents (*i.e.*, Requisition Lists) and to inspect the accommodation provided by his Department, and he further assured General Paine that certain houses suggested by me as available for the Berridge House Training scheme were full of dry rot and highly unsuitable (*see* page 99). In view of the astonishing way in which I have been misrepresented I must be allowed to make perfectly clear that up to the time of my dismissal I had no idea whatever that General Brancker's Equipment Department regarded me as a source of friction.

Colonel Bersey had invariably appeared to agree with my views regarding accommodation and the necessity for inspecting the W.R.A.F. Clothing. I was quite unaware at the time of the existence of certain correspondence which it transpired later had been passing between Colonel Latimer and Colonel Bersey. From these Minutes it appears that Colonel Bersey had asked Colonel Latimer to take over the inspection of W.R.A.F. Clothing, and this agreement had been arrived at on 19th July, 1918, several days before Colonel Bersey brought Colonel Latimer to see me, when I was given to understand clearly that the agreement we arrived at was a definite one. The following Minute, signed by Colonel Bersey, was Colonel Latimer's authority for taking over the inspection of clothing at the W.R.A.F. Clothing Depot :—

" 19.7.18.

"We shall be more than glad of your assistance with regard to inspection. Will you undertake this entirely, and we will assist to find staff as may be necessary? They will be under your control.

" M.3."

Colonel Latimer replied as follows :—

" M.3.

" Correct.

" (*Signed*) O. W. LATIMER,

" 19.7.18." " Lieut.-Colonel, Q.5.

As to whether it was advisable or inadvisable that the inspection of W.R.A.F. Clothing should be taken over by the Equipment Department I must leave to those who had to deal with the man-power shortage to decide. I had done my duty in providing the women necessary for this particular bit of work. I may, however, point out that this question was very acute at the moment, and it is difficult to understand why it was felt to be necessary to employ forty untrained men from a Labour Battalion in learning to inspect women's clothing when the work could have been easily accomplished by twelve women.

In view of these proceedings it is not surprising that the Clothing Controller and other Officers concerned should have felt a growing lack of confidence

in a Commandant who appeared to be so unreliable and irresponsible. Miss O'Sullivan was at a loss to understand why I had given her definite instructions on the lines of our agreement with Colonel Latimer, when at the same time I had apparently already consented to hand over the whole of the inspection of clothing to the Equipment Department without informing her of such an important change of procedure affecting her status and responsibilities.

When Colonel Latimer's representative arrived at the Clothing Depot with a written authority from Colonel Bersey to take over the duties of inspection it was difficult for the Clothing Controller who had already been accused by Colonel Latimer of obstruction, to know whose orders it was her duty to obey.

It came to light later that five urgent letters addressed to me by her asking for advice and instruction in this difficult situation had been withheld. The Clothing Controller naturally felt deeply aggrieved and disheartened that no notice was taken by me of her appeals for help. It is not to be wondered at that during the House of Lords Inquiry (*see* page 284) she declared that this apparent neglect on my part, and the fact that I had not replied, had led her to believe that Mrs. Beatty and Miss Andrew were right when they assured her that I was an "impossible" and unreliable woman.

It was only after Colonel Bersey had left the office that the five missing letters in question were found in his room, and the Clothing Controller realised a few days before my dismissal that I was unaware of their existence, or of the fact that the Equipment Department had taken over the inspection of clothing.

Every day I was becoming more uneasy about the position which it was clear must seriously affect the whole well-being of the Corps and make itself felt not only at the Headquarters office, but to all who came in contact with the W.R.A.F.

It was evident that Colonel Bersey, my Liaison Officer with other Departments, on whom I had to depend for all information as well as for all supplies, for some reason

or other, felt it to be his duty, not only to withhold information and the necessaries vital to the existence of the W.R.A.F., but was entering into agreements with the Heads of other Departments without my knowledge and without the consent of General Paine. This in itself was a serious drawback to efficient work, as well as detrimental not only to discipline but to the spirit of confidence and *esprit de corps* which I was striving to promote. I have already shown (*see* page 78) that Dame K. Furse declared that Colonel Bersey had agreed that she should take control of the W.R.A.F. in Air Force Stations who had transferred from the W.R.N.S. It will be remembered that Dame K. Furse had issued orders to the Officers concerned to this effect without the knowledge of either General Paine or myself. In the case of the agreement between Colonel Latimer and Colonel Bersey regarding the transfer of the inspection of W.R.A.F. Clothing to the Equipment Department the serious situation was apparent that Colonel Bersey had not only entered into an unauthorised agreement with another Department but had assured me, both in writing and verbally, that he had not done so. It never dawned on me that I was being so seriously misled until I saw the Minutes which made the position clear. In view of this and other circumstances, I felt that it was becoming impossible to work if I were not to be treated with the straightforwardness and confidence which I had the right to expect, and which had always previously existed between my colleagues and myself.

The breakdowns in the Posting Department seemed to increase. Complaints were constantly made that drafts of women had been sent either to the wrong Air Force Station or on the wrong day, when no rations or accommodation were available, or, worse still, women belonging to the wrong category arrived at remote Stations where their particular services could not be utilised. In other cases women were left at a wayside station miles from an Air Force Camp, without any instructions where and how to proceed (*see* pages 29, 30).

The waste of time and money spent in trying to redeem these constant mistakes—many of which could

not possibly be excused on the grounds of war-time emergency work—made me feel that it was foolish of me to allow myself to be held responsible for action which could easily have been prevented by a little commonsense, but which it was not within my jurisdiction to put right.

About this time I received a letter from a General, warning me that a very serious intrigue was on foot among certain people connected with the W.R.A.F. to get me dismissed, as I was "fair and straight," but he begged me not to lose heart. I realised then that my almost single-handed efforts could not prevail unless I was given a liaison officer who could obtain the necessary facilities to carry out the work (*see* page 445).

After consulting with the Senior Officers on General Paine's Staff and with friends in the Service, I decided to ask General Paine to let me resign, as it appeared to be the only right course. Much as I disliked seeming to run away from a difficult and unpleasant task in war-time, I had given it a fair trial for two months, and I did not feel that I could continue working against such odds. I did not care whether I was Commandant or one of the rank and file—my only concern was to get the work for which I was held responsible properly done, and to ensure the welfare of those under me. It was clear, however, that for some reason or other the W.R.A.F. was not to be allowed any of the necessary equipment on which it depended, viz., accommodation, uniforms, Officers, and recruits. The Officers were available and ready to train—the recruits were ready to enrol—their work was urgently needed, and yet, though the Equipment Department had the matter in hand many weeks before I became Commandant, nothing so far had been done to enable me to house, train, and clothe the W.R.A.F. It is difficult to understand why it was considered advisable in war-time, in spite of the man-power shortage, to withhold from the W.R.A.F. everything that was necessary to enable the Corps to succeed, and without which, in fact, it could not exist.

I saw General Paine on August 16th, and asked permission to resign. It was my intention to suggest

that Colonel Bersey should be called to hear my reasons and have an opportunity of replying, but General Paine was called away immediately and said that he would see me on the following day.* Before I left the room, however, he told me that he did not intend to allow me to go. The next day (August 17th) he informed me that he had decided some days earlier to supersede Colonel Bersey, and he read me a letter which, it appeared, he had written on August 13th, before I had seen him, telling Colonel Bersey this.

I then mentioned my difficulties over the Clothing and Accommodation, and the holding-up of the revised Regulations, and I told General Paine that I had heard rumours about conditions and lack of discipline allowed by the O.C. in certain Camps, particularly Hurst Park, which had made me uneasy—and that no one in M.3 appeared to be able to give me any help in clearing up these matters. I assured General Paine that my one wish had been to get everything concerning the women on to a good footing without any fuss or friction, and without drawing public attention to a state of affairs which could be put right quietly. General Paine seemed to realise the situation, and said that he would discuss it the next day. I told him that I had made every possible effort and had given everyone concerned a fair trial, but that Colonel Bersey did not seem able to obtain the necessary help and co-operation from the Equipment Department. I assured General Paine that there was no apparent friction—the Officers concerned always promised to carry out my requests, and seemed to cordially agree with them—these promises, however, were not fulfilled. I could never rely that instructions would be carried out, and the work suffered in consequence.

General Paine assured me that he had every confidence in me, and that there must be no further talk of my resigning, as the Air Ministry valued my work and did

* It has been repeatedly alleged (apparently on the strength of a statement of my own, which, however, was only an epitome and did not go into details) that I brought about Colonel Bersey's supersession. This is not the case. The above is an accurate account of the circumstances.

not intend to lose my services. The following told me that he had decided to appoint a certain (Colonel Powell) to succeed Colonel Bersey, and confident that everything would now go well. We discussed the difficulties of having the two Departments running side by side, and the inevitable overlapping—General Paine realised that the dual control did not exist in the Q.M.A.A.C. or W.R.N.S., but he did not seem to think it was possible to make other arrangements. I said that if the Air Council wished it to be run on its present lines, there was no reason why it should not succeed, provided that both Heads of Departments were loyal and straightforward with each other, and had the interest of the Corps at heart. I felt sure from what General Paine told me, that I could look for this co-operation from Colonel Powell. General Paine never gave me any reason to think that he was not satisfied with my work.

When I returned to W.R.A.F. Headquarters I found that the news of Colonel Bersey's supersession had already reached his staff. Lieut.-Colonel Williams (*see* pages 110, 111) came to see me and begged me to try to prevent the appointment of Colonel Powell, who, he said, was "quite impossible—useless and no good"—and would not give me any help. Colonel Williams said that he felt that he ought himself to have the billet. He urged me to recommend him to General Paine, telling me that he had always "supported" me and had told General Paine a short time before how "charming" I was to work with. He seemed determined to try to force me to go to General Paine, and showed great annoyance when I told him that it was impossible for me to take any such step, as it was my duty to try to work with whomsoever the Master-General of Personnel chose to appoint. My refusal to interfere was apparently bitterly resented by Colonel Williams, for, during the House of Lords Inquiry, it transpired that he went to see Colonel Powell and advised him not to accept the post, alleging that I was impossible to work with. He also mentioned in his evidence that he had seen Colonel Lord Acheson at the War Office, who, he alleged, told him that

he had formed a bad opinion of me. I do not know Lord Acheson and never had any dealings with him beyond seeing him in the distance at large Conferences.

In his evidence Colonel Williams admitted that he had called a Meeting in his room of the Air Force Officers on Colonel Bersey's staff to protest against General Paine's appointment of Colonel Powell, and that to quote his words he "considered it really an affront that he [Colonel Williams] should be passed over," for which breach of discipline, especially in war-time, he might have been court-martialled.

The Counsel for the Air Ministry, Mr. Rigby Swift, (now Judge Rigby Swift) pressed me to admit in the House of Lords Inquiry that I had spoken in the most derogatory way of Colonel Bersey to Colonel Williams. As I never did anything of the sort, and should regard it as a breach of faith to discuss a colleague behind his back with his Juniors, I can only deny the allegation. As a matter of fact, Colonel Williams had written to me to inform me that he would much prefer to work directly under me, as—to quote an extract from his letter—" I do not like him [Colonel Bersey] one little bit."

In view of these and other experiences, I felt justified in the House of Lords Inquiry, in saying when asked what opinion I had formed of Colonel Williams, that I had not found him "very reliable." Their Lordships, however, in their Report, draw particular attention to this answer of mine, as an indication of my bad and ungenerous disposition and censure me for making it, but it is difficult to see how I could have replied differently and at the same time, truthfully.

CHAPTER XV.

Mysteries and Misrepresentations.

Colonel Powell took over Colonel Bersey's Department on August 19th, and Colonel Bersey was given a billet in the Air Force Recruiting Section.

The next day General Paine saw Colonel Powell and me to discuss the work and future progress of the W.R.A.F. He told us that the W.R.A.F. Headquarters would shortly be removed into more satisfactory premises, and instructed me to go over some suggested accommodation immediately. I was fully aware of his anxieties about the man-power shortage, and the urgent necessity for putting women in to replace the men wherever possible. I told General Paine that I felt sure that everything would now go ahead very fast, as the necessary office machinery was ready, the Officers available, and the training scheme arranged, and that he would not know the Force in about a month's time if Colonel Powell was able to secure the necessary facilities, equipment, uniforms, and accommodation. General Paine then said that he, too, was quite convinced that it would soon get on to the right footing, and that he would be able to release shortly a large number of men for other work, and he added that if things did not progress he would have to get rid of anyone who was to blame (*see* pages 267-272). This remark was made in quite a general way, and I never for one moment thought that General Paine intended me to understand that he was dissatisfied with me, and was warning me that I would be dismissed shortly. On the contrary, his words and manner indicated that he had full confidence in Colonel Powell and myself.

In the House of Lords Inquiry, however, the Air Ministry tried to prove that when General Paine made this comprehensive remark, he thereby gave me the month's notice, required under the W.R.A.F. Regulations to terminate the services of an Officer who is not dismissed, but whose services, for some reason, are no longer desired. As will be seen, the Air Ministry put forward the plea

that I had therefore no ground for complaining that I had been summarily and irregularly dismissed, without an adverse report and the full Inquiry which under the Regulations must precede summary dismissal.

General Paine asked me to put Colonel Powell into touch with the Office Organization. I gave him all the help in my power. I was surprised to find that someone had evidently been making mischief and trying to give the impression that I was an impossible person and unfit to be in the Service.

The first day that he was in the office, he told me that he thought it was very unfortunate that I had not allowed Colonel Bersey's Staff to communicate with mine, and discuss office matters with them, and he seemed astonished when I assured him that I had encouraged them to do so in every way. He surprised me still more by telling me that he heard that I was very rude on the telephone and that my predecessor, Lady Gertrude Crawford, had said so. I assured Colonel Powell that this must be a mistake, and that I had never spoken on the telephone to Lady G. Crawford, whom I had not seen for sixteen years, and that I could not contemplate being discourteous when speaking on the telephone. Later on, after the House of Lords Inquiry, Lady G. Crawford was invited to explain, and she declared that she had never heard of the matter, and could not understand how her name was brought in. It was a strange experience, during the few weeks at the Air Ministry, to find oneself credited by total strangers with having said or done things which in ordinary civilised life would be regarded as outrageous and, therefore, impossible to suggest.

On August 23rd 1918, I went down early to Avery Hill Training College to lecture to 180 Probationary Officers who were just starting their Course, and to send off a draft of 200 who had been posted to various stations.

I got a message that General Paine wanted to see me immediately. I went back to London and found General Brancker in his room. I had only met General Brancker once for a moment some weeks earlier when he came in to see General Paine.

General Paine, whom I had not seen for some days, asked me how things were going ; I told him that all was well—that the first Training Course at Avery Hill had produced 200 useful Officers, and that I had another large number in training—I also told him that I had got a "Refresher Course" for Senior Officers, and now that I had others available to replace them, at the Hostels and Air Force Camps, I hoped at once to select some of the Seniors for the posts of Area Inspectors, and to promote other promising Officers, as I was most anxious not to allow any good material and work to be wasted. General Paine agreed that I had done right to send Inspectors down from W.R.A.F. Headquarters temporarily, to make any investigations required in the Areas and to post all available competent W.R.A.F. Officers to take charge of Hostels in the Air Force Camps, where there were urgent difficulties to tackle on the spot, which could not be allowed to stand over.

General Paine seemed quite satisfied, and his questions were evidently asked with the intention of informing General Brancker as to our progress and policy as he then told me that he was leaving to take another post, and that General Brancker was going to succeed him as Master-General of Personnel.

General Brancker and I then had a few minutes talk. General Paine was in the room, but did not take part though he could have heard every word if he wished to do so.

General Brancker asked me how the W.R.A.F. was getting on. I told him that things were improving every day—that the Training Course at Avery Hill was in full swing, and that we had just posted out 200 very promising Officers, as well as those we had previously trained. I also mentioned that the new batch of candidates (180) now in training at Avery Hill, where I had been lecturing that morning, seemed very keen and enthusiastic. I told him that I hoped soon to be able to post out about 1,000 more Officers as the Berridge House scheme would start as soon as the loan of Avery Hill expired. I told him that I was just about to post more Area Inspectors,

who were to be selected after a Refresher Course for Senior Officers, which I was holding the following week at Avery Hill.

General Brancker then said—"I hear you are having difficulty with your staff." I assured him that the trouble was over long ago, and took place when I first joined. I explained that three officers at Headquarters had resigned, apparently because I could not recommend their friends for posts for which I did not think them suitable at the time. I told him about the lack of discipline when I took over, and how a Probationary Officer had actually threatened me that certain people would bring about my dismissal unless I gave senior posts to their friends.

I assured General Brancker that I had a very promising staff now, and that everything was running smoothly, that, in fact, the women had been splendid throughout. In his evidence before the House of Lords, General Brancker gave an entirely different account of this interview and said that I had complained of an intrigue, and that other women would not co-operate with me, and that I suggested that he should appoint someone to succeed me. These statements I absolutely deny. They are entirely unfounded.

He further stated in his evidence that in consequence of my alleged complaints he had interviewed Lady Rhondda (Women's National Service), Dame K. Furse's Deputy (Miss E. Crowdy, W.R.N.S.), Mrs. Burleigh Leach (Chief Controller, Q.M.A.A.C.), Miss Durham (Head of the Women's Employment Exchanges), Lieut.-Col. Lord Acheson (War Office), and Major Lloyd Graeme (Secretary to Sir Auckland Geddes, National Service).

Miss E. Crowdy, Lieut.-Col. Lord Acheson, and Major Lloyd Graeme were total strangers to me. I had only seen Mrs. Burleigh Leach twice personally, in what I believed to be, most friendly interviews. Dame K. Furse, I only saw once alone, when she came to ask me why Mrs. Beatty had resigned. Miss Durham I never had any personal communication with during the whole time I was in the W.R.A.F. On several occasions, I met her

and the other ladies above mentioned in large Conferences, where various Departments and Voluntary Associations were represented, and where any private conversation was impossible.

General Brancker stated in his evidence that the object of his interview with them, was to " put the case to them frankly, and ask for their assistance," as I had declared, he alleged, that I could not obtain their co-operation.

I can only again repeat that I never said anything of the sort to General Brancker. If he, on the other hand, informed the Officials concerned that I had complained immediately to him that they would not give me any help, it is not to be wondered at if they took exception to this allegation, and declared that it only existed in my imagination.

General Brancker also made the startling statement on oath that when first introduced to him I assured him that my station in life was considerably better than that of certain other people, and that I gave this as a possible reason why people would not work with me. I can only leave it to reasonable people, especially men and women of the world, to judge whether there is any likelihood of someone of ordinary education being guilty of such unpardonable bad taste and pointless vulgarity. Surely such a preposterous suggestion can only reflect on the person who seriously puts it forward.

General Brancker also said in evidence that I had struck him as being rather helpless and ineffective.

Without questioning his opinion, I may be forgiven for saying that General Brancker certainly saw me at a disadvantage. At the moment I was suffering from giddiness caused by lack of food, and by the shaking of the defective Ford car in which I had been driven up to London. I had been working up to 3 a.m. the night before, and had made an early start that morning before breakfast could be obtained in my hotel, owing to war-time difficulties; I had given three lectures at the Training College at Eltham, and was sent

for to come back to London for this interview, before I had time to get breakfast, which was all I was in need of.

When I returned to the Office I found that it had been well known for some time in M.3 that General Brancker was going to take General Paine's place.

I did not see General Brancker again for several days, but Colonel Powell constantly saw him regarding his work. As soon as Colonel Powell arrived I had told him of the most urgent matters requiring attention—Uniforms, Accommodation, and the alleged conditions in certain Camps. I particularly discussed the difficulties of Hurst Park, where the five hundred Women Motor Transport Drivers were in training, and I told him that I had heard rumours that the O.C. and certain Junior W.R.A.F. Officers (*see* page 391) were over-riding the authority of the Senior Woman Officer, Mrs. Kitto. I also told him that in view of these disputes between the W.R.A.F. Officers I proposed to move them all to different Stations, so as to be able to judge of their qualifications fairly, when they were removed from an atmosphere of friction. Colonel Powell said that he entirely agreed.

I carefully explained that I did not wish Mrs. Kitto to feel in the least that this change reflected on her, as I believed that she had done her best under very difficult circumstances. I was merely going to move her to an important post at the Berridge House Training Centre, where her services would be more valuable.

I also told him that it had been impossible for me so far to find out the truth of these reports. So far, the Senior W.R.A.F. Officer-in-Charge had only reported her personal grievances and difficulties to me when I visited the Hostels, and I never had heard anything from her of the real state of affairs, as she had seemed unwilling to treat me with confidence. After my dismissal I heard for the first time that she had written to me on several occasions, reporting serious irregularities. It seems that these letters from her did not reach me, in the same way that other Reports were withheld (*see* page 131) and she was

naturally much hurt and annoyed at my not having replied. Later it became apparent that she had been informed by the late disloyal Officers at Headquarters that I had a bad personal reputation, that I was entirely incapable, and that I never paid any attention to my work, and was hardly ever in the Office. This caused her to regard me as unworthy of confidence or respect, and unlikely to give her any assistance in upholding good discipline and decent conditions. It was only when she heard at the "Refresher Course" that other W.R.A.F. Officers, who knew me personally had found me willing to help in every way, that she decided to speak openly and tell me something of the real state of affairs at Hurst Park.

I asked Colonel Powell to visit Hurst Park with me, so that he might understand the difficulties of maintaining discipline in a very large Camp on the Race course, with Hostels scattered all over the town—some of them being isolated villas, and it had just come to my knowledge that certain favoured Motor Transport Drivers had been given special permission by the O.C.—Colonel Janson—to become Immobiles, and live in lodgings without any supervision.

I told him that in spite of several visits to Hurst Park, I did not feel that I was being allowed to know the real state of affairs. I explained that the Hostel Administrator (Mrs. Kitto) was away for a few days, but that if he had a look round the premises and accommodation he would be in a better position to advise me what steps to take when later on we saw the Administrator.

When Colonel Powell and I motored to Hurst Park, we were accompanied in the car by the head of the Motor Transport Section—the Headquarters of which was Hurst Park.

On the way down the situation at Hurst Park was discussed, and I was assured that everything was in good order, and that the Colonel was a first-rate O.C. I said that in view of the friction which obviously existed between the Technical Officers and Mrs. Kitto, I intended

to move these W.R.A.F. Officers to other posts, and give them a fresh start (*see* page 398).

As soon as we arrived at Hurst Park, the O.C. made a very unfavourable report on the work of the Administrator (Mrs. Kitto), who was away for two days at the Refresher Course for Senior Officers, and he handed me a bundle of letters from the Motor Transport W.R.A.F. Drivers, most of them written on the same date in the same strain, complaining of the unfairness of the Senior W.R.A.F. Officer (Mrs. Kitto) and pointing out how happy they were under the control of the W.R.A.F. Technical Officers. As soon as we got into the Mess where the Drivers were at tea, some of them got up and made speeches to the same effect. It could not fail to strike one that the whole affair was a put-up demonstration to reflect on the Administrator (Mrs. Kitto).

It transpired later that my inspection of the women's quarters at the Depot was very unwelcome and greatly resented. After the inspection was over, word went round that I intended to move certain W.R.A.F. Officers, and that in retaliation for what was regarded as interference on my part, I was to be given a hard time.

The next day, Colonel Powell told me that he had seen General Brancker, and told him about our visit to Hurst Park, and that I had decided to change the W.R.A.F. Officers there. Colonel Powell added that he himself thought that I certainly ought to take this step.

In the course of a talk about the work I again realised that serious attempts were being made to prejudice Colonel Powell against me. He astounded me by saying that he had felt obliged to complain to General Brancker and General Paine that I had told him that I would go to see Lord Weir if anything went wrong, and he said that General Brancker was very angry with me. I assured Colonel Powell that he was mistaken, that I had never said anything of the sort, as I had no access to Lord Weir and had only been to him on two occasions, when he sent for me with General Paine (*see* pages 57, 114). I asked him why he had not cleared the matter up with

me before going to General Brancker. Colonel Powell told me that he had been assured that I "was always slipping down to Weir with tales."

Colonel Powell was soon convinced that he had misunderstood me, and he told me that he would try to put the matter right with General Brancker before I saw him. In view of the friction existing between the Political and Military Departments at the Air Ministry, it was possible that General Brancker would rightly be greatly prejudiced against anyone whom he believed carried tales from his Department to higher quarters in such an irregular manner. Colonel Powell told me afterwards that he had spoken to General Brancker and assured him it was a misunderstanding, but that General Brancker made no comment.

In his evidence in the House of Lords Inquiry, Colonel Powell stated that I had admitted that I had said it, but that I assured him that I did not intend it to be taken seriously. He must have misunderstood me in the same way that he evidently misunderstood Lady Gertrude Crawford regarding my alleged rudeness on the telephone (*see* page 138). In my bewilderment as to what could have made Colonel Powell believe that I would go behind the back of my Senior Officer (General Brancker) to Lord Weir when I had no direct access to him, I asked him whether possibly he had overheard and misunderstood some innocent office joke. As a matter of fact, we had a harmless "catchword" in the office—"Oh, we really must ask Lord Weir," when a particularly difficult and absurd conundrum presented itself to which no solution seemed possible, and the correspondent who propounded it threatened to complain to Lord Weir unless an immediate reply was received.

In the House of Lords Inquiry, the Counsel for the Air Ministry, tried to prove that Colonel Powell, as soon as he took over, had been obliged to ask General Paine's leave to resign, as a protest against my alleged threat to communicate direct with Lord Weir. General Paine, however, in his evidence, denied any knowledge of the

matter, and pointed out that he would at once have asked me about it if he had heard of it.

Mr. Rigby Swift later on returned to this point when cross-examining General Paine, and did his utmost to prove on behalf of the Air Ministry that I had been guilty of the grave breach of discipline of threatening to go behind the back of my Senior Officer to the Secretary of State, Lord Weir. General Paine, however, emphatically denies that Colonel Powell ever made any complaint of the sort to him.

Probably an Advocate's ardour caused the Counsel for the Air Ministry to forget in the course of his reflections on me that Miss K. Andrew, one of his witnesses, had not threatened, but had actually indulged in this serious irregularity, and had gone direct to Lord Weir over the head of her Commandant and of Major-General Paine (*see* pages 246-248).

There seemed to be no end to the unjust accusations made against me behind my back. I am informed that during the day Colonel Bersey returned to clear up at the Office he announced that he was only leaving temporarily as I would soon be got out, and that he would then return.

After a day or two, Colonel Powell evidently realised that he had been misled, and during the short time we were together he appeared to have confidence in me, and to be anxious to help. We got through a vast amount of work, and I felt hopeful that everything would now go ahead on right lines.

After my dismissal, Colonel Powell remarked to an Air Force Officer, Captain Cherry, who was expressing his regret at my dismissal, "If I had been here two or three months earlier, Cherry, this thing would not have happened" (*see* page 305).

CHAPTER XVI.

Sudden Dismissal by General Brancker.

On August 26th, General Brancker sent for me. He kept me waiting a long time after the appointed hour, in the passage outside his door. Suddenly, his Secretary, who had been General Paine's Secretary, asked me very hurriedly to come with him, and he hastily took me out of the main corridor into some back regions, where, with many apologies, he begged me to remain until he returned. I was mystified at the time as to why I had to be concealed. Many months later he told me that it was to prevent my seeing Lady Rhondda, who was coming to visit General Brancker, and that the latter did not wish me to meet her.

After a long wait General Brancker sent for me—this was the first time I had had an interview with him since he succeeded General Paine.

Though I had every sympathy with the over-worked and harassed Senior Officers, I could not fail to be struck with General Brancker's manner. He appeared to be very angry, but as I knew that everything was running smoothly in my Department I did not imagine that I was the cause of his annoyance. As soon as I got into his room, General Brancker told me very abruptly that he had "seen the W.R.N.S.," and that he had decided that Dame K. Furse should take command of the W.R.A.F. who had transferred from the W.R.N.S., and that he had also agreed to cancel their transfer.

This was a direct reversal of General Paine's policy, *i.e.*, that as the rank and file in question had already transferred to the W.R.A.F. and the Air Ministry was actually paying for them, they, therefore, already belonged to the Air Force and no longer to the Admiralty (*see* pages 72, 73).

He told me further that Dame K. Furse did not wish to have any communication with me, and that he had agreed that she should deal direct with him whenever she wished. This decision that Dame K. Furse should communicate with him instead of through the ordinary channels, *i.e.*, her *vis-a-vis*, the Commandant of the W.R.A.F., was a serious reflection on me, and as I and my staff had

always treated Dame K. Furse and the W.R.N.S. with all possible courtesy I realised that someone must have misrepresented matters behind my back and that my new Chief was seriously prejudiced against me. As General Brancker, however, merely gave me his instructions very abruptly, and did not invite my opinion, I could not express any, and I was careful not to show any annoyance. I merely took his orders, and said that I would put the matter through at once. I asked him whether the arrangement previously arrived at by General Paine held good—that we should resume control of these Stations as soon as sufficient W.R.A.F. Officers were trained. I mentioned that I had already trained 280, and should have another 200 ready in a few days—General Brancker did not reply.

He then told me very angrily that there was something else he intended to tell me. He said this in such a significant way, and seemed so unaccountably annoyed, that I was much puzzled. We were interrupted, however, and General Brancker said he would finish later. In the House of Lords Inquiry it transpired that General Brancker had intended to dismiss me at this, his first official, interview.

In his evidence at the House of Lords Inquiry, General Brancker told the Court that he had made efforts to get hold of me so that I might be present at his interview with Dame K. Furse's representative, Miss Crowdy, but that I could not be found.

On the other hand there is evidence to show that I had been in the office all day, and that no messages had been received from General Brancker.

General Brancker also said in his evidence that his decision regarding the arrangement with the W.R.N.S. was arrived at in consultation with me. I declare this to be untrue, and the Minutes of the Air Council produced in Court makes no reference to my alleged concurrence in the arrangement with the W.R.N.S., and to that extent, therefore, confirms what I say, and is against General Brancker.

Immediately after my interview with General Brancker (August 26th) the O.C. at the Air Force Depot where the

strike had taken place (*see* pages 120-122), telephoned to say that as the ten days would then expire, during which the Air Ministry was to enquire into their grievances, he feared that the women would go on strike next day unless a decision was given. I told the O.C. that I would come down the next morning, and I asked Colonel Powell to accompany me. We went on our way to the station to see General Brancker for a few moments, regarding the bonus which had been promised to the W.R.A.F.

The women were delighted at my having kept faith with them, and gave us a hearty reception, and we arrived at a satisfactory agreement. They drank my health afterwards in tea when we went round the work-sheds, and Colonel Powell and I returned to London quite satisfied with their loyalty and friendly spirit. The five W.R.A.F. Officers I had posted there seemed already to have won the confidence of the rank and file.

The next day (August 28th) I was lecturing early at the Avery Hill Training College to two hundred new Probationary Officers who had just arrived—they were a promising lot and seemed keen about their work. At the end of the lecture, when I invited questions, some of them asked me whether it was true that I did not intend to promote them, however well they did. I was surprised at such an absurd question, and assured them that it was my intention to promote on merit, and merit alone, and that no amount of influence would carry any weight with me. I explained that I should give every Officer all the help in my power by means of "Refresher Courses" to qualify for promotion, and that everyone would have an opportunity of gaining experience in each branch of the Service—Technical and Hostel and Administration. I added that it was my intention to give as many as possible a short Course at Headquarters, so as to enable them to understand the running of the office machinery, and get into personal touch with the H.Q. Staff. The Probationary Officers seemed quite satisfied, but they would not tell me who had assured them that I did not intend to promote them.

Later in the day I was at a Medical Conference in the Surgeon-General's room when a message came that

General Brancker wished to see me immediately. I at once left the Conference, and as soon as I reached his room he told me very abruptly that he had sent for me to tell me that I was to go. From his manner it was evident that something had annoyed him greatly. I had no idea that anything was amiss. During the one day that I had worked under General Brancker I had settled a very intricate strike, and had only returned the previous night. I therefore asked him what I had done to cause him to dismiss me. He seemed extremely angry, and told me that though he understood I "was very efficient," I "was grossly unpopular with everyone who had ever seen" me, "that there was a war on, and that no one could do any work while" I "was about the place," and that I "had been the cause of the resignation of a very efficient Staff, including Mrs. Beatty," who, he said, was "an excellent Officer."

As Mrs. Beatty, Miss Pratt, and Miss Andrew had resigned at their own wish many weeks earlier, and as Lord Weir and General Paine had themselves decided to accept these resignations (*see* pages 51-61), I could not see the justice of being summarily dismissed from the Service weeks later by General Brancker on that ground—only ten days after his predecessor, General Paine, had refused to allow me to resign. I made no remark, however. General Brancker then told me that Lord Weir had decided to dismiss me—that he had seen him twice about it, and that his decision was irrevocable. He told me that I might, if I liked, put something down on paper for Lord Weir, but that it would make no difference.

General Brancker's bullying, blustering contemptuous manner during this interview would have seemed more appropriate if he had been dealing with someone convicted of fraud, treachery, or of serious misconduct which rendered him unworthy of any respect. His attitude showed plainly that, though I was a total stranger, he was greatly prejudiced against me (*see* page 372).

It is interesting to note that in the Report their Lordships particularly commend General Brancker for the manner in which he dismissed me.

I was fully aware that General Brancker was acting contrary to the Regulations in dismissing me without my having been shown and asked to initial an adverse Report from my Senior Officer, and before a Court of Inquiry into my conduct had been held, but I thought it better under the circumstances not to enter into any discussion with him at that time. I, therefore, merely asked when he wished me to go, and he said very abruptly, "Now! at once! to-morrow morning!" He added that he supposed that I "had some sort of a job before" I "came along and that" I "had better try to get back to it if possible." As I had given up the appointment of Insurance Commissioner to join the W.R.A.F., and had previously held very responsible posts during sixteen years' public work, I felt justified in telling General Brancker that I had not come to the Air Ministry to look for a job. He then said that he meant that he hoped my "ability would be made use of somehow." I said that I realised that slander had won—General Brancker laughed, and said he was afraid it had, and that he was sorry for me; but he asked me if I would "return good for evil," and give him "the names of Women Officers who would be likely to help to keep the work going." I did so, telling him that whether I was inside or outside the W.R.A.F. I should continue to do my best for the Corps as I was most anxious that the W.R.A.F. should not break down. I reminded General Brancker that the office work had accumulated, as I had been away the whole of the day before, settling a strike in the country, and I suggested that as there were some very urgent matters to be dealt with, it would be fairer to my successor if I left the office in order. After some hesitation, he said that I could stay until Saturday.

As some Air Force doctors were waiting for me to inspect Hospital accommodation, and I had arrears of work which kept me in the Office until 3 a.m. I had no opportunity of going into the matter of my dismissal that day, beyond informing my staff, who refused to believe that Lord Weir had consented to be a party to such injustice.

CHAPTER XVII.

More Mystery.

The day after my dismissal was a very full one, as it had been impossible to cancel in time numerous appointments with Officers who were coming up from the country, and I was booked up for many days ahead.

The news was current in the Office that Lady Drogheda had been appointed, and was coming to take over immediately. There seemed to be some hitch, however, as Colonel Powell asked me whether I could suggest a scheme which would enable the new Commandant to confine herself to inspecting the W.R.A.F. in the Air Force Camps, and be relieved of office duties. As I knew that the well-being of the Corps must suffer under any such arrangement, I declined to make any suggestions to facilitate it. In the end, Lady Drogheda was not appointed, and General Brancker's other selection for the post, Mrs. Pankhurst, was mentioned. I received a message from him a day or two later asking whether I thought her appointment would be generally popular. As I did not know Mrs. Pankhurst, I replied to the effect that I was unable to express any opinion. Mrs. Chalmers-Watson (Sir Auckland Geddes' sister) was recommended by Lady Rhondda, as she herself was unable, owing to her father's sudden death, to take the post. Difficulties, however, arose. Dame K. Furse and Miss Crowdy were then put forward by National Service, but in the end Mrs. Gwynne Vaughan, an Officer of the Q.M.A.A.C. was appointed at the instance of the War Office, which was anxious to resume control of the women, who had transferred from the Q.M.A.A.C.

In the evening I went to see (the late) Sir Robert Morant, Chairman of the National Health Insurance Commission, with whom I had worked for seven years. Sir Robert Morant had taken the greatest interest in my work in the W.R.A.F. He could hardly believe that I had been dismissed from the Service at an instant's notice, given me verbally by General Brancker, a few days after

General Paine had refused to allow me to resign, and without my being allowed to know of what I was accused.

We discussed the impossibility of my rejoining the Insurance Commission under the stigma of summary dismissal especially as I was not an established Civil Servant.

Those who are aware that, under the Regulations, an Insurance Commissioner has to act as Referee in intricate cases of dispute, will realise that anyone holding that responsible office should be of irreproachable reputation.

Sir Robert Morant fully realised that my one wish was to clear myself as speedily as possible, in accordance with whatever was the correct procedure in the Service for attaining that end. He advised me to see the Parliamentary Secretary (Major Baird) and not to leave my post until I had got some official intimation in writing from the Air Council, which had appointed me, to confirm General Brancker's action. Sir R. Morant assisted me to write a suitable letter to General Brancker to that effect and I at once made an appointment with Major Baird (now Sir J. Baird) on the telephone for the following morning.

In my interview with Major Baird, I asked him if he would explain the cause of my summary dismissal, a few days after he had assured Mr. Tyson Wilson in the House of Commons, that the Air Ministry had every confidence in me (*see* page 89). Major Baird seemed greatly embarrassed, and told me that he had no idea I had been dismissed, and that he had heard at the Air Council (of which he was a member), that I had resigned on the grounds of ill-health. I assured him that my health was perfect, and that I was quite in the dark as to the reasons for Lord Weir's sudden *volte face*. I had a long interview with Major Baird, during which I told him some of the true facts regarding the state of affairs. It was evident that he was in total ignorance of the office organisation, and had no idea that I had been entirely dependent on M.3 Department and on the Equipment

Department for all accommodation, equipment, uniforms, and other necessaries.

Major Baird promised to make an appointment for me to see Lord Weir, and it was arranged that I should remain at my post until I had seen the Secretary of State, and received a formal letter of dismissal from the Air Council.

Major Baird gave me to understand throughout this interview, that he knew nothing whatever of my dismissal or its cause. I believed him, and was therefore astounded when it transpired later that he had been interviewed by Mr. Tyson Wilson, M.P., and Sir A. Geddes, and had carried the "serious statement" from the latter to Lord Weir, which caused my dismissal (*see* pages 219, 368, 369).

It seems incomprehensible that Major Baird, himself a soldier, felt that it was consistent with fair play and honourable dealing, to take this action behind the back of my Senior Officer, General Paine, and without giving me any opportunity of defending myself, or even of knowing that certain allegations had been brought against me by a Department with which I never had any dealings.

I reminded Major Baird that up to the time of my joining the W.R.A.F. I had been one of the National Health Insurance Commissioners (Wales). He seemed somewhat perturbed when I pointed out that my summary dismissal for presumably "disgraceful conduct" would debar me from any further official or public work, unless I was allowed to clear myself.

In spite of this conversation, lasting quite half an hour, Major Baird, in his evidence in the House of Lords Inquiry, denied any recollection whatever of having had an interview with me.

That same evening, Colonel Powell and I went to see General Brancker, with reference to the report I had passed on to him about Hurst Park Motor Training School. The Administrator, Mrs. Kitto, had been to see me on her way back from the "Refresher Course"

at Avery Hill (*see* page 400). She had given me such a serious account of the state of affairs, and the irregularities permitted by the O.C. and two Women Officers, over whom she was not allowed control, that I asked Colonel Powell to come and hear her statement, and I had it taken down from her, during the course of our interview. Colonel Powell had seen General Brancker after our interview with Mrs. Kitto, and arranged with the latter that we should see him on the following day. During our interview with General Brancker, I told him that I was only handing on the report I had received from Mrs. Kitto for his information and investigation. I also repeated what Colonel Powell had already told him that, in my view, the wisest course was to move the two Women Officers, mentioned in Mrs. Kitto's Report, as quickly as possible to other Stations, so that they might be given a fair trial in fresh surroundings.

General Brancker seemed very much annoyed—he remarked that Colonel Janson was an old friend of his, and he gave instructions that the case was to be dealt with at once.

As I have before said, I was not aware at that time, that Hurst Park Motor Training School and the five hundred women in training there, were under the control of the Equipment Department, and that the O.C. and other Officers, had been appointed by General Brancker. He told Colonel Powell and me to go on to see the Head of the Disciplinary Section, regarding Mrs. Kitto's Report. In our interview with this Officer, I again emphasised the fact that I was merely handing in the notes of the Report I had received, for inquiry, and that I could not personally give evidence excepting on certain matters. I mentioned that Colonel Powell had been with me when Mrs. Kitto made her report, and that he could verify the statements taken down by my secretary at the time. There so far as I was concerned as Commandant, W.R.A.F., the matter ended.

On August 31st I met Major Baird in the passage at the Air Ministry, and he stopped to ask me if I had seen

Lord Weir, as he said that he had arranged an appointment for me in view of my request. I told Major Baird that I had not yet heard anything from Lord Weir, and he again promised to see about it, but repeated that he had already taken steps to fix an interview and was surprised that I had not received a message.

On September 2nd Lord Weir gave me an appointment. His manner was so distant, I saw, at once, that there must be something very wrong, as on the two occasions on which I had previously seen him he had been very cordial, and treated me with confidence. I asked him what I had done to cause him to dismiss me summarily ten days after he had refused my resignation on the grounds that my services were too valuable to be dispensed with. Lord Weir hesitated a great deal. He told me that there was nothing wrong with my work or administration, or anything that reflected on my efficiency or capabilities, but that it had been decided that I must go. I again asked him to tell me what had happened to cause him to take such a serious and sudden step, and I reminded him of Major Baird's reply to questions in the House of Commons a very short time previously to the effect that the Air Ministry had every confidence in my "ability and discretion." Lord Weir seemed as much embarrassed as Major Baird had been, and said that he was satisfied that a Woman's Organisation refused to co-operate with me. I asked him to tell me who had found me difficult to work with, as the friendliest relations appeared to exist between all the Women's Organisations with which I had been for many years in touch.

I reminded Lord Weir that up to the moment of my dismissal he had allowed me to believe that my work gave every satisfaction, and that I felt in common justice that I ought to be allowed to know what had caused him to order me out of the office as soon as General Paine had vacated his post. Lord Weir again declined to state his reasons, but he repeated that a Woman's Organisation would not co-operate if I remained—he added that he wished that he had gone into the matter

more fully. I asked him why he did not go into it now, instead of doing me an injustice. Lord Weir hesitated for a few moments and then said he was sorry it was impossible, *as the matter had been decided by a "higher power," who, he believed, had already appointed my successor.*

It was clear from Lord Weir's manner and words that he had no fault to find with my work, but that he was under the impression that there was something serious against me which made it impossible for the Women's Organisation he referred to to work with me.

As he declined to give me any definite reason for my dismissal, I wrote to him after this interview on September 2nd, 1918, complaining that I had not been treated with justice, and again asking him why I was dismissed.

During the course of the Inquiry my Counsel pressed Lord Weir very closely for his reasons for having suddenly decided to dismiss me :—

"Mr. Hawke : . . . So you cannot tell me the name of any single Ladies' Organisation with which she was failing to obtain sympathetic co-operation ?

"Lord Weir : I do. I suggest the W.R.N.S.

"Mr. Hawke : In what particular did she fail to obtain sympathetic co-operation with them ?

"Lord Weir : I do not know. I cannot tell you that.

.....

"Mr. Hawke : Of course, you did not ask Miss Douglas-Pennant ?

"Lord Weir : No, I did not.

"Mr. Hawke : So it really comes to this—when you dismissed Miss Douglas-Pennant there were no charges against her, and if there were, you did not give her the chance of meeting them ?

"Lord Weir : There were no definite charges, and no specific instances—none whatever.

"Mr. Hawke : Can you tell me any indefinite charge that there was against her ?

"Lord Weir : I do not know what you mean by any indefinite charge.

"Mr. Hawke : You made the distinction, and I supposed you had some distinction in your mind.

"Lord Weir: . . . I mean there were no specific instances of misconduct.

.....

"Mr. Hawke: Now, I want you just to tell me this—after she went there were six ladies' names given to you as likely to succeed her? . . . .

"Lord Weir: I think probably more than six.

"Mr. Hawke: And there was one lady whom you said you personally desired?

"Lord Weir: Yes.

.....

"Mr. Hawke: Give me first the lady that you wanted? . . .

"Lord Weir: Is it necessary for me to reply to that question?

"Mr. Hawke: What harm is there?

"Lord Weir: There is no harm, but it is only bringing in people.

"Mr. Hawke: Will you tell me?

"Lord Weir: Yes, Lady Rhondda, herself.

"Mr. Hawke: That is the one you wanted yourself?

"Lord Weir: Yes."

Later on my Counsel again endeavoured to elicit from Lord Weir his reasons for summarily dismissing me, but Mr. Hawke failed to do so before the Chairman (Lord Wrenbury) intervened.

"Mr. Hawke: Now, you were in charge, you were the Secretary of State, I mean, during the whole of the time Miss Douglas-Pennant was there. You told us it was your decision, and yours alone, that led to her supersession. Was she dismissed because she failed to exhibit the organising and administrative ability necessary to make her tenure of her post successful?

"Lord Weir: I have given you the reason.

"Mr. Hawke: Can you say 'Yes' or 'No' to this?

"Lord Weir: You might put it again to me.

"Mr. Hawke: Was she dismissed because she failed to exhibit the organising and administrative ability necessary to make her tenure of her post successful?

"Lord Weir: I came to that conclusion; yes.

"Mr. Hawke: On what grounds, give us a single instance? It will not be difficult.

"Lord Weir: Let me put this once again?

"Mr. Hawke: I have been allowing you to wander from my questions very much. I now desire that you answer this one. You have said now that she was dismissed because she failed to exhibit the organising and administrative ability necessary to make her tenure of her post successful. You have said that. Now, I want to know a single instance in which that occurred, or anything like it?

"Lord Weir: I cannot give you the instances.

"Mr. Hawke: Very well. I did not say the instances. You cannot give me a single instance?

"Lord Weir: I cannot give you any specific instances.

"Mr. Hawke: Very well. Now, one other point. Do you say that she was dismissed or removed because she failed to display the tact which was essential to enable her to co-operate successfully with her colleagues and subordinates?

"Lord Weir: I do not allege that specifically.

"Mr. Hawke: Do you know, Lord Weir, that these are the reasons given by your Counsel for her dismissal?

"Lord Weir: It may be involved.

"Mr. Hawke: **I am suggesting to you that this case, the case of the Department over which you presided is every word of it untrue.**

"Lord Weir: **I am giving you my case, not the Air Ministry's case. I am telling you the facts. I have nothing to do with these questions.**

"Mr. Hawke: She was not dismissed because of any lack of tact?

"Lord Weir: I have told you all the reasons.

"Mr. Hawke: Cannot you say 'Yes' or 'No' to that? Was she dismissed for any lack of tact?

"Chairman [Lord Wrenbury] (addressing Mr. Hawke): I may tell you you are not advancing yourself with any member of the Committee with this line of cross-examination. I think we see very clearly what Lord Weir means."

Many persons who were present have since assured me that if Lord Wrenbury could "see what Lord Weir meant," they certainly were unable to do so.

Part III.—Demanding an Inquiry.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Sympathy and Slander.

My letter to General Brancker, dated August 29th, 1918, requesting that I might be furnished with a written confirmation from the Air Council of its decision to dismiss me, had so far received no reply. In the course of my interviews with both Lord Weir and Major Baird, it had been decided that I should remain at my post until I received this communication. During this time, Colonel Powell and I went to inspect the Avery Hill Training College.

The Probationary Officers were unaware of my dismissal, and I did not wish to unsettle them by telling them of it, as I had last seen them full of enthusiasm, when I gave them their first lecture. I heard, however, that some of them wished to speak to me. During our interview, they seemed much upset, and asked me whether it was true that I did not intend to allow more than about forty to be appointed officers irrespective of whether they passed the examination, in fact, whether it was really my intention to refuse posts to any but a favoured few. They assured me that certain candidates had been told that they would be given appointments in any case, as they had influential friends. I scouted the idea, and reminded them that only ten days before, when I gave the opening lecture, I had impressed upon them how personally disappointed I should be unless every one of them passed.

The Probationary Officers seemed much relieved; but I had the uncomfortable certainty that someone had again tried to prejudice me in their eyes. This proved to be true. The Training Course came to an end a week after I had left

Headquarters, before my successor arrived, and immediately over one hundred and forty of the Probationary Officers were told by the Air Ministry that they were unsuitable—only about forty being retained.

I have since seen many of these promising cadets, and heard from reliable sources what took place.

A scene of great confusion seems to have followed this announcement, and many of the rejected candidates felt convinced that they had passed the examination, and they naturally resented the alternative suggestion that there was something against their personal characters which rendered them unsuitable.

Some of them, who had spent everything on their outfits, found themselves stranded in London, without money or lodgings. No arrangements were made for them, and they had to carry their baggage, as best they could, a considerable distance to the station. On reaching London, a certain number went to various newspaper offices in Fleet Street to protest against their unfair treatment. Many of them came from Scotland and other distant places, and were quite friendless in London—others, who had the necessary money to pay their railway fares, feared to return home, and confess that they had been rejected as unfit for Officers' posts in the W.R.A.F. Contributions were collected to help some of the more urgent cases.

Numerous letters of complaint reached me — I found that I was held responsible for this serious state of affairs, and reports were widely spread that it was due to my alleged harshness and incompetency, and was held to be a complete justification for my instant dismissal. As I had been dismissed over a week before it occurred, I went to see Lord Weir's Private Secretary, Sir M. Bonham Carter, whom I had never met. He was most courteous, and before I referred to the object of my visit, he opened the conversation by volunteering the remark that I had a most serious grievance against the Air Ministry. I told him that it seemed very unjust that I should be held responsible for what was done in the

W.R.A.F. after I had left, and that unless the Air Ministry made clear in the Press that I was no longer Commandant, I should be obliged to send a statement to the papers.

Soon afterwards the Air Ministry issued a notice to the Press announcing that I had been succeeded by Mrs. Gwynne Vaughan as Commandant, W.R.A.F., and shortly afterwards paragraphs appeared to the effect that I had been dismissed from the W.R.A.F. owing to unpopularity with my staff.

As soon as it became known in official circles that I had been dismissed, the Chairman of the National Health Insurance Commission (Wales), Sir Thomas Hughes, and the Deputy Chairman, came to see me. We had worked together for nearly seven years, including the strenuous days of starting the Insurance Act, and they gave me to understand that they placed no credence in the preposterous reports which were being spread about me. I told them that Lord Weir had apparently acted on hearsay, without any proper investigation, and that neither he nor General Brancker seemed to have realised that I had any previous experience of work, or that up to the time I joined the W.R.A.F. I had been one of the Insurance Commissioners. I told the Insurance Commissioners that until this matter had been investigated, and my character cleared, I was, of course, debarred from undertaking any official or public work. I informed them that I intended to write to the Prime Minister, as he was my chief during the time that I was an Insurance Commissioner, to ask him to cause an Inquiry to be held.

As Lord Weir had told me in our interview (*see* pages 156, 157) that he could not take any step to reconsider the decision arrived at, because "*the matter had gone up to a higher power who, he believed, had already appointed my successor*," I concluded that he referred to the Prime Minister, who alone had jurisdiction over a Secretary of State. I, accordingly, wrote to Mr. Lloyd George on September 2nd, asking for a full Inquiry. Sorry as I was to trouble the Prime Minister in the midst of his overwhelming work, I had no choice but to do so.

Under the special Regulations governing the W.R.A.F. which had been passed by the Air Council, a member of that Force could not resign without permission, and was obliged to serve for a year, or during the War, whichever was the longer period. *Summary dismissal, on the other hand, could only be resorted to in cases of grave misconduct, on receipt of an adverse report of the Senior Officer, and on the verdict of a Court of Inquiry.** In my case, I was unaware of any misconduct, there was no adverse report from my Senior Officer, who had refused my resignation a few days previously; no Inquiry was held, and I had been given no reason for dismissal by his successor, General Brancker, excepting, to quote the words he used, "gross unpopularity with everyone who has ever seen you."

I had an interview with the Prime Minister's Private Secretary, Mr. J. T. Davies, who assured me that the Prime Minister knew nothing about my dismissal, and was certainly not the "*higher power*" referred to by Lord Weir. Later on, Mr. J. T. Davies told me that he had seen Major Baird and Lord Weir, and that Lord Weir had found that he had been misled as to my alleged unpopularity.

Various people from inside and outside the W.R.A.F. had been to the Air Ministry and to Downing Street to protest against Lord Weir's action, which had caused great uneasiness, not only in the Force, but among many of the Men's and Women's Organizations, Trades Unions, and other bodies, who realised the danger of allowing it to pass unchallenged.

At the same time, letters of sympathy and indignation continued to pour in from many people in all parts of the country who had worked with me previously, as well as from parents of W.R.A.F. Officers and members of the rank and file.

I was greatly touched at receiving offers of weekly contributions towards legal expenses from certain disabled soldiers and W.R.A.F. rank and file, who could ill afford to help others.

* For the finding of the Committee on this point *see* page 292.

Some surprise was expressed at the attitude of the Press at the time of my dismissal. No enquiries were received by me, and I had no means of stating my case until later. The reason for this was fully explained when I was informed that several Press representatives called at W.R.A.F. H.Q., but received such discourteous messages, purporting to be from me, that they retired convinced that the dismissal of anyone with such insolent manners was amply justified.

Over two hundred of the W.R.A.F. Officers wished to resign to express their indignation. I sent them word that as I was still at the moment Commandant, I should have to regard any action of the sort as mutiny in War time, as our country must come first. I told them that I relied on them to remain at their posts and to try to carry on the work on right and straight lines.

I saw General Paine on his return from France on September 4th. He had only just heard from his Secretary that I had been dismissed. I asked General Paine whether he could explain what had happened, and why General Brancker, a total stranger, had accused me of being impossible to work with. General Paine said that he was quite in the dark; that the news of my dismissal had caused him the greatest surprise, as Lord Weir had agreed with him only a few days earlier that I must not be allowed to resign and had never informed him then that he was in any way dissatisfied with me. General Paine added that he was convinced that the efforts to cause my dismissal were due to my determination to bring the right sort of women Officers into the W.R.A.F., and that he had told Lord Weir that this was his opinion. I assured General Paine that I intended to press for an Inquiry as a matter of principle and in the interests of a clean public Service. It was plain that if such unjust methods in defiance of all Regulations were allowed to pass unchallenged, there would be no protection whatever in the Government, Naval, and Military Services for those who were the object of slanderous attacks from unprincipled people, who had the ear of Heads of Departments.

On September 10th, I received a letter from Lord Weir, dated September 6th, in reply to mine of September 2nd (*see* page 157) and also one which the Air Council had sent to the Insurance Commission (Wales). Both these letters were written in courteous terms, very different from the tone adopted by Lord Weir and General Brancker when dismissing me. Lord Weir had seen, meantime, the copy of my letter to the Prime Minister, which I had sent him for his information (*see* page 162). He now realised that I had been one of the Insurance Commissioners before joining the W.R.A.F., and that under the stigma of summary dismissal I was debarred from any official or public work until I was cleared. Every effort was now made by the Air Ministry to retrieve the blunder caused by Lord Weir's irregular action. Neither of the letters from the Air Ministry alluded to my dismissal, and in both it was made clear that there was nothing which in any way reflected on my ability or efficiency.

The following is Lord Weir's letter :—

" 6th September 1918.

" Dear Miss Pennant,

" You will now have received from the Secretary to the Air Council the letter of the same date, answering your letter to General Brancker, dated 29th August.

" I have also to acknowledge copy of your letter to the Prime Minister.

" Allow me to say how much I regret that you should feel that you have been treated with injustice, as during the whole of your service here I appreciated fully that you had no other object than to serve the interests of the W.R.A.F. I must say that I felt that I had made the reasons for a change clear to you at our interview, but to put the matter concisely, I had definitely come to the conclusion that you would not be successful in solving the difficulties which confronted you in the establishment of the W.R.A.F., and, in particular, in obtaining the sympathetic co-operation of the other women's organisations, which appears to be so essential to secure results in good time.

" The matter was one of urgency, and I felt bound to proceed with the appointment of a new Commandant. As I said, there was nothing which reflected in any way on your capacity or efficiency,

but you appeared to be confronted with a combination of circumstances which would take too long to clear away, and the only solution, therefore, was a change.

"In view of this I regret that you should associate the incident with any reflection on yourself, which would cause you to take the view that resignation from the Welsh Insurance Commission was necessary.

"In the whole of the circumstances, I feel that no good would result to anyone by the institution of an enquiry, and subject to what the Prime Minister might decide, I would beg you not to press me to a refusal.

"Yours very truly,

"(*Signed*) WEIR.

"The Hon. Violet Douglas-Pennant,

"W.R.A.F.,

"Mason's Yard, S.W."

On receipt of the official intimation from the Air Council, I left the office. Shortly afterwards, my Staff at Headquarters made me a most touching presentation, and the genuine feeling of indignation displayed by them at "gross unpopularity" having been given by General Brancker as the ground for my instant dismissal from the Service, convinced me that I had won their affection and friendship (*see* pages 303, 304).

I sent the following reply to Lord Weir's letter :—

Copy.

"Jules' Hotel,

"Jermyn Street,

"S.W. 1.

"10th September, 1918.

"The Right Hon. Lord Weir,

"Air Ministry,

"Hotel Cecil,

"Strand, W.C. 2.

"Sir,

"I have to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 6th September, in which you discourage an enquiry and beg me not to press you to a refusal of the same. I note that you have not advanced any grounds for refusing me this enquiry, and unless it can be proved that it is contrary to the public interest

that I should do so, I feel that it is my duty to ask for an enquiry, not only into the reasons for my summary dismissal; but also into the conditions which existed in the camps when I became Commandant, and into the circumstances which prevented me, in less than three months, from placing matters on a more satisfactory basis.

"I am,

"Yours faithfully,

"(*Signed*) V. DOUGLAS-PENNANT."

As Colonel Powell had only been a week in the Office, and relied on me to inform him and the new Staff at Headquarters as to W.R.A.F. policy and organisation, I was naturally anxious, for the sake of the country in war-time, that the work should be carried on without intermission. We were just in the act of moving out of Avery Hill Training College, into the large Training Centre for twelve hundred women at Berridge House, Hampstead, and I was also fitting out some Depot Hostels in the Areas. I therefore told Colonel Powell, after I left the Office, that he could depend on me to give him all possible help, on the telephone, to carry on until my successor arrived. He and the Staff at Headquarters were in constant communication with me, and when a strike broke out among the W.R.A.F. working in a large Air Force Camp, Colonel Powell came to ask me how to deal with it, and how to satisfy the women who were agitating to obtain the uniforms and the bonus withheld by the Air Ministry.

It seems clear that Lord Weir must have received most serious information regarding me to have convinced him that it was necessary, in the public interest, to rush me out of the Office, before my successor arrived to take over.

Soon after my dismissal I went to see Lady Rhondda at the Office of the Women's Branch of National Service, believing that she would be greatly concerned at what appeared to be the temporary success of the enemies of clean administration in the Government Service.

Lady Rhondda expressed her astonishment at the way a Senior Officer with many years' service had been treated, and said that it was the first she had heard

of it. She asked why I had not refused to leave the Office and she advised me to take legal proceedings against the Air Ministry for wrongful dismissal. In view of Lady Rhondda's personal assurances, which I never for one moment doubted, and as I did not know of the existence of her misleading memorandum on the W.R.A.F., it never occurred to me until I saw the following letter in *The Times*, nearly a year later, that she had taken such an active part in bringing about my dismissal :—

Copy. *3rd June, 1919.*

"To the Editor of *The Times*.

Sir,

The Case of Miss Douglas-Pennant.

I have read the debate in the House of Lords, and the White Paper published by the Air Ministry, referring to Miss Douglas-Pennant's Case, with considerable interest, as my position in the Ministry of National Service at the time of Miss Douglas-Pennant's dismissal, corresponded with that held by Dame Katherine Furse of the Admiralty, and as Head of the Women's Department, I was responsible for advising Sir Auckland Geddes on this matter. In these circumstances, I feel as much responsibility attaches to me as to anyone outside the Ministry directly concerned.

Yours sincerely,

(*Signed*) RHONDDA."

In her evidence before the House of Lords Inquiry, Lady Rhondda admitted that she did not make any enquiries from General Paine or from me, but obtained the necessary information from Mrs. Beatty, Miss Andrew, and Dame K. Furse (*see* pages 358-359).

During these times, the wildest stories were spread broadcast as to the alleged true cause of my dismissal, and there is no doubt that they greatly prejudiced me in the eyes of people who did not know me.

Among the reasons which it was alleged, rendered me unfit to be Commandant of the W.R.A.F. were :—

1.—That I was a typist of disreputable parentage—an adventuress who had been jobbed in by General Paine, to the indignation of certain Members of the Air Council.

2.—That I was a well-known immoral character—no decent women would serve under me—young girls were unsafe in my hands.

[Messrs. Elliott & Fry.

VIOLET DOUGLAS-PENNANT

November, 1921

3.—That I was a woman of uncontrolled temper—a confirmed drug-taker, a bully and virago, who habitually used bad language, and was hardly ever sober, whose slovenly and disreputable appearance was a disgrace to the Corps.

4.—That I was the daughter of a debauched and bankrupt Irish Peer. (This preposterous statement regarding my father will strike all those who knew him as an indication of the length to which slander was allowed to go).

5.—That I was a spy in the pay of the Germans.

Some of the stories spread about me were so small-minded and vulgar that they could only reflect on those who invented or believed them. Members of the Press were informed that I told the Probationary Officers that unless they addressed me as "The Honourable," I would never promote them, and that I had torn down the name-card off my door in the Office in a fit of rage, because I resented the fact, it was alleged, that to my mind "The Honourable" was not written in sufficiently prominent letters.

I was reported to be such a bully and tyrant that it was alleged that I gave orders that the Motor Transport Drivers were never to be allowed any lunch when I was at H.Q. This story was actually repeated in all good faith to my brother.

I had given particular instructions that steps were to be taken to ensure that each Driver got away for lunch, as I had noticed that the girls were often left waiting long hours on their cars by Junior Air Force Officers outside Restaurants and Hotels.

As an example of the way in which I was misrepresented, I quote two instances:—One day I stopped on the stairs at the H.Q. Office to ask a charwoman, who was much upset by the sudden illness of another of the charwomen, how her friend was getting on, and whether I could do anything for her in Hospital. Later on, I heard that it had been spread broadcast by those who observed our conversation, that I had sworn at the charwoman, accusing her of neglecting her work, and had kicked her pail of water over her in a fit of anger. Again, the lift attendant gave me a little bunch of flowers from her

garden. It was spread abroad that I had violently abused her for bringing flowers into the Office, and snatched them away from her.

As I believed that a full Inquiry would soon clear the matter up and expose the unprincipled recklessness of these reports, it seemed wisest to treat them with contempt.

I was convinced that reasonable people would reflect that there must be some motive for circulating these preposterous stories, and I believed that even those who did not know me would realise that it was hardly possible for someone who had been a voluntary worker for over sixteen years, to have been transformed suddenly into such a bad character after only ten weeks at the Air Ministry. These extraordinary tales seem, however, to have been believed and repeated by certain people, who, though strangers to me, ought to have known that such rumours were at any rate unlikely. Some excuse may possibly be found for them owing to the fact that, during the previous seven years, I had been working too hard in my district (Wales) as a National Health Insurance Commissioner, and over war work, to keep in touch with many people in London.

It was a surprise, however, to find that the rumour that I was a spy in the pay of Germany was actually believed and repeated by people known to members of my family for years. This accusation of being a traitor to the country I have humbly endeavoured to serve has cost me very dear, in view of the reflection it casts on my family —seven members of which, including my two brothers and three nephews, gave their lives in the early days of the war. On my own behalf, I do not wish to say anything ; but in justice to the untarnished name they bore, I must be forgiven for entering into a somewhat personal matter.

When I first heard the rumour that the Air Ministry had discovered that I was a spy, and had decided to hush the matter up, after dismissing me, I refused to credit the report, and I put it out of my mind, believing it to be similar to the tales regarding my alleged immorality (*see* pages 214-221, 223-233). After my dismissal,

however, I met a member of the House of Lords whom I had not seen for a long time. He seemed very indignant when I told him of my sudden dismissal, and he suggested coming to see me that afternoon, to hear details. I do not know what he was told in the interval : but when he came later, he startled me by peremptorily demanding when I had last seen Sir Ernest Cassel. I said I could not remember accurately, as it was some time ago—my visitor insisted on knowing whether it was within the last few months. I then remembered that I had seen Sir Ernest Cassel on business connected with a war hospital about three months previously, and I said so. On hearing this, my visitor informed me that he would never speak to me again, as that was sufficient, and abruptly left the room, and like many other people, has cut me ever since.

Some months later I was asked to visit a patient, believed to be dying, in a Nursing Home. After paying several visits there, I received a telephone message one day, when I was starting for the Hospital, telling me not to keep my appointment. I heard later, that the Doctor-in-charge, who did not know me personally, had been warned suddenly that I must not be admitted on any account, as it was well-known that I was a spy on behalf of Germany.

There is only one possible explanation for these contemptible allegations, though it can hardly be regarded as an excuse for such grievous slander. Before joining the W.R.A.F. I had been appointed a Member of the Statutory Special Committee, set up by the Government to provide Treatment and Training for Disabled Service Men. Some of us were anxious that provision should be made for cases which, though not severe enough for ordinary hospitals, were not fit to be discharged. As the Government were unable to take action, a private Committee, of which I was a member, proposed to start a Hospital for the special treatment of these cases in the country. A most suitable estate at Enham, near Andover, happened to be in the market. I was asked to approach certain people with a view to getting a loan of the £30,000 immediately required to

purchase the estate—I asked Sir Ernest Cassel, whose late daughter was a great friend of mine. Sir E. Cassel most generously lent the Committee the required sum, making the cheque out to me. I at once passed it on to the Chairman of the Committee, and Lord Henry Cavendish Bentinck, M.P., Colonel Wilfred Ashley, M.P., and I were appointed Trustees of the estate, and the loan was repaid by the Committee, within a few months. Unfortunately, a message from Sir Ernest Cassel, making an appointment for me to see him regarding the cheque, was telephoned inadvertently to me at W.R.A.F. H.Q. instead of to my private address, and was taken down during my temporary absence.

It seems incredible that Sir Ernest Cassel's most generous action should have been, apparently, so grievously misrepresented in order to discredit me.

The inconsistent attitude adopted by certain members of the Air Ministry towards me was very marked. While Lord Weir was now endeavouring to show there had been no intention of dismissing me, and that the Air Ministry had greatly valued my work, General Brancker, on the other hand, continued to treat me as if my dismissal had been due to disgraceful conduct which rendered me unworthy of even ordinary courtesy in business matters. It will be remembered that I had made myself personally responsible to the London County Council for the handing back of Avery Hill Training College, in the same condition as we received it, when it was so generously loaned by that body (*see* page 102). In order to keep my pledge it was necessary for me to visit the College a few days after my dismissal, and before my successor arrived, as Colonel Powell and the Air Force Officers, who had assisted me throughout, were anxious that I should meet the London County Council representatives, and complete the arrangements. I told Colonel Powell that I could only do so subject to General Brancker's consent, as I did not wish my action, in keeping my promise to the London County Council, to be regarded by him as officious interference. I explained matters to General Brancker's Secretary,* and

* Late Secretary to General Paine.

asked for an interview, as there were various intricate points which it was my duty, as late Commandant, to discuss with General Brancker. The Secretary was most courteous; but General Brancker sent word that he declined to see me. I again explained the situation, and again received a peremptory refusal, to the effect that General Brancker did not intend to see me at any time on any day. The difficulty was only got over by my dictating a letter in the passage outside his room, which I addressed in courteous terms to myself from General Brancker. The purport of this letter was to ask me to go down to Avery Hill. General Brancker, after further representations and delay, finally signed it, and I was thus able to fulfil my promise to the London County Council Valuer.

Just before I was dismissed, I had made all arrangements for the removal of the Officers' Training Centre from Avery Hill to Berridge House, Hampstead. Immediately after my successor arrived, General Brancker inspected the new Centre, and expressed himself as highly satisfied with the Officers and Training Scheme. It is said that in an address to the newly-trained Officers and H.Q. Staff, he told them that he realised that the W.R.A.F. had been greatly handicapped in the past by a bad Commandant ; but under the new one, who had an excellent reputation, he was sure things would go well.

On the other hand, the Air Ministry, which, it will be remembered, had dismissed me on the grounds of my alleged "unpopularity" continued long after I left to refer to me for assistance as if, on the contrary, they had every confidence in me. In October, I was rung up late one night, when in bed, and requested to come at once to the Air Ministry, to see about a W.R.A.F. member of the rank and file, who had been taken very ill and was said to be in a neglected and dying condition. It appeared that unsuccessful attempts had been made to get into touch with the W.R.A.F. H.Q. Staff. I did not wish to appear to interfere with a member of a Corps from which I had been dismissed, but after two urgent messages it did not seem possible to neglect the Air Ministry's appeal.

On reaching the Air Ministry, I was informed that the sick W.R.A.F. lived in a distant part of London—no trains, 'bus, or taxis were available at the late hour. I reached her on foot, and found a very young girl—an Immobile (*i.e.*, a W.R.A.F. supposed to be living at home) who had lately left her parents in Scotland with another girl, and had been posted to work as a clerk at W.R.A.F. H.Q. Deserted by her friend, who proved unsatisfactory, and being quite friendless in London, the sick girl was lodging in a basement, in the same room with a foreign waiter and another woman. Indignant at such an arrangement, I communicated with the Air Ministry the next day, and offered to convalesce this sick member in the country. I asked the Air Ministry to inform me when she might be moved ; but I was unable to obtain any reply, and though I succeeded in seeing the girl again after she was moved to a suitable lodging, she suddenly disappeared, and I failed to trace her.

CHAPTER XIX.

Official Evasions.

For many weeks, indignant Resolutions continued to be forwarded to the Prime Minister from private persons, Trades Unions, and Women's Organisations, who had worked with me for years. As I had not received any reply to my letter to the Prime Minister, dated September 2nd, in which I urged that a full Inquiry should be held, I sent the following letter :—

Copy.

" Jules Hotel,
" Jermyn Street,
" S.W. 1.

" 14th October, 1918.

" Dear Mr. Lloyd George,

" On September 2nd, I wrote to tell you that I had been summarily dismissed by the Air Ministry on the alleged grounds that I was ' grossly unpopular ' a few days after I had been assured that Lord Weir and the Master-General of Personnel (Sir Godfrey Paine) had every confidence in me, and would not allow me to resign.

" I was obliged to trouble you in the matter for two reasons.

" 1.—That as I hold the office of Insurance Commissioner (Wales) under you, I did not feel that it was possible for me to resume my work for the Commission, until an Inquiry had been held into the grounds of my summary dismissal from the Air Ministry.

" 2.—That Lord Weir told me, in an interview on September 2nd, that he could not reconsider the matter, as it had gone up to a higher power, who, he believed, had actually by that time, appointed my successor.

" As soon as I was dismissed, my friends were determined that the matter should at once be cleared up. I have so far persuaded them to await your decision ; but as I have not received any reply to my letter of September 2nd, I feel obliged to assume that you do not intend to give me an Inquiry.

"If this is the case, I shall have no choice but to send in my resignation as an Insurance Commissioner, and allow immediate steps to be taken, to make the whole of the real facts public, and also the conditions which existed in the Camps, when I became Commandant, and the circumstances which prevented me, in less than three months, from placing matters on a more satisfactory footing.

"Yours sincerely,

"(*Signed*) V. DOUGLAS-PENNANT."

I received the following letter from the Prime Minister's Private Secretary, Mr. J. T. Davies :—

"10, Downing Street,
"S.W. 1.

"22nd October, 1918.

"Dear Miss Douglas-Pennant,

"With reference to your letter of the 14th October, and a previous correspondence, the Prime Minister desires me to inform you, that he has asked Mr. Cecil Harmsworth to hold a full Inquiry into the cause of your dismissal from the position of Commandant to the W.R.A.F.

"Yours sincerely,

"(*Signed*) J. T. DAVIES.

"The Hon. Violet Douglas-Pennant."

Mr. Cecil Harmsworth also wrote to me on October 22nd, 1918, informing me that the Prime Minister had appointed him "to enquire fully into the cause of your dismissal from the Air Ministry." I saw Mr. Harmsworth on October 23rd. A statement appeared in the Press, announcing that though the Inquiry would be held in private, the result would be made public.

During the course of Mr. Harmsworth's investigations, which lasted nearly three weeks, I saw him constantly, and he told me that he was interviewing a large number of witnesses. Though I was never allowed to meet them, or to hear what charges were brought against me, Mr. Harmsworth treated me throughout with every courtesy and I was convinced that he was anxious that I should be given fair play. Mr. Harmsworth informed me that he had been advised by Lord Weir to see Lady Rhondda, Dame K. Furse (W.R.N.S.), Mrs. Burleigh Leach

(Q.M.A.A.C.), and Miss Durham (Head of the Women's Employment Exchanges, Labour Ministry), which Department was in charge of recruiting for the W.R.A.F. in conjunction with Colonel Bersey and Colonel Williams.

I told Mr. Harmsworth that I hardly knew Dame K. Furse, as I had only met her in large Conferences, and in Sir Godfrey Paine's room, with the exception of a short interview when she came to ask me why Mrs. Beatty had resigned. My official dealings with the W.R.N.S. were very slight, as the whole business, connected with the transfer of certain Officers and ratings, was conducted through the Admiralty and the Air Ministry, and by General Paine personally, during two interviews with Dame K. Furse at which Colonel Bersey and I were present.

With regard to Mrs. Burleigh Leach, I had seen her three times in her office—once at a large Conference, and twice when I visited her personally, and I had no reason to doubt that our relations were absolutely cordial. My only other communication with her was a letter on the death of her sister, in reply to which Mrs. Burleigh Leach wrote expressing her appreciation of the sympathy I had offered her.

During the time I was Commandant, W.R.A.F., I only saw Miss Durham (Employment Exchanges) three times at Conferences, and once at a Meeting in Sir Godfrey Paine's room, when the question of recruiting was discussed, and she appeared to be perfectly satisfied with the arrangements arrived at.

I was greatly surprised when Mr. Harmsworth informed me that Lord Weir had particularly asked him to see Lady Rhondda. I told Mr. Harmsworth that Lady Rhondda was almost unknown to me, and that I felt quite sure that she had nothing to do with my dismissal, as she had herself told me that she had no knowledge of it. I could only conclude that Lord Weir had referred Mr. Harmsworth to her under some misapprehension.

Mr. Harmsworth seemed much astonished on hearing this. He returned to this point several times on different occasions, and his persistency puzzled me. He asked if I was quite certain, that I never had any official dealings with Lady Rhondda and National Service. I told him that the W.R.A.F. recruited through the Labour Ministry Employment Exchanges, and that Colonel Bersey's Department had been entirely responsible in this matter, and that I had only met Lady Rhondda (then Lady Mackworth) casually. I also mentioned that I had suggested her name two years before for a post in Wales under National Service, which, owing to other work, I had myself been obliged to decline when offered it by Mr. Neville Chamberlain, then Head of that Department. I suggested Lady Rhondda, who at that time had never done any public work, excepting as a Militant Suffragette, thinking that she might like to have an opportunity of gaining some experience of administration, and of the conditions of women's work. I told Mr. Harmsworth that I had seen Lady Rhondda soon after my dismissal, and that she had expressed her surprise and said it was the first she had heard of it, and that she had urged me to take legal steps to protest against it. Again, Mr. Harmsworth seemed greatly astonished at my statement.

It must be remembered that at the time of his Inquiry, Lady Rhondda's letter in the *Times*, June 3rd, 1919, had not yet appeared, and I had no idea that she had assisted Mrs. Beatty and Miss Andrew in bringing about my dismissal (*see* pages 147, 168, 358, 372).

Mr. Harmsworth's Inquiry ended on November 5th, and on November 6th, 1918, he wrote to inform me that with regard to a further Inquiry :—"*I am strongly recommending that this course should be adopted.*" Mr. Harmsworth also told me verbally, that in justice to me, he felt that a full judicial Inquiry should be held.

During the course of an interview at 10, Downing Street, Mr. Harmsworth asked me what I "should consider some sort of reparation for the way you have been

treated." I told him that I was not seeking decorations or other honours, and that the only reparation which would satisfy me was that the conditions under which the women were working should be put on to a decent footing, and that a full Inquiry should be held.

On November 18th, 1918, Lord Henry Bentinck, M.P., asked in the House of Commons, whether the result of Mr. Harmsworth's Report would be published immediately. The reply, given on behalf of the Air Ministry by Major Baird, was in the negative. My brother and I saw the Prime Minister's Secretary (Mr. J. T. Davies) that afternoon, and he assured us, *that in view of the fact that a further Inquiry would immediately be held*, it was considered unnecessary to publish Mr. Harmsworth's Report at this stage, and that this was the sole reason for withholding it.

On November 21st, Mr. Harmsworth told me that the Prime Minister had decided that a further Inquiry should at once be held, and that he (Mr. Harmsworth) was to see Lord Weir and the Judge-Advocate General about the arrangements.

I told Mr. Harmsworth that it would be necessary for me to consult certain files and documents at the Air Ministry, and it was agreed that I should ask Sir M. Bonham-Carter (Lord Weir's Private Secretary) for permission to do so.

A day or two later Mr. Harmsworth told me that Lord Weir was raising objections, as he did not wish for an Inquiry; but that the matter would shortly be arranged.

During this time I received constant messages from the Prime Minister assuring me that the Inquiry would be held—that the Judge-Advocate General was to be consulted, and that I should hear from Lord Weir about the arrangements.

The preparations for the General Election then intervened, and Mr. Harmsworth was called away to his constituency. From the Prime Minister's personal

assurances through Mr. J. T. Davies, and from the information given me by Mr. Harmsworth, I had every reason to believe that the Inquiry would immediately be held. The following correspondence which passed between Mr. Harmsworth and myself shows the position on November 25th, 1918 :—

Copy.

" Jules Hotel,
" Jermyn Street,
" S.W.1.
" 25th November, 1918.

" Dear Mr. Harmsworth,

" I rang up Miss Betts [Mr. Harmsworth's Secretary at Downing Street] on Saturday, and heard that you were away in your constituency. She told me that you were expecting to hear from the Judge-Advocate General about the arrangements for the Inquiry, and that you will let me know, as soon as you receive his reply.

" I asked Mr. Felix Cassel [Judge-Advocate General] on the 'phone this morning, whether he could give me any information as to the possible date of the Inquiry, and he told me that he had not heard anything official about the matter. I then rang up Miss Betts, and told her this, as I thought it possible that your letter to him might have gone astray. If, on the other hand, the arrangements were being made by the Air Ministry, some hitch might have occurred.

" I am very sorry to trouble you, as I am sure you have done everything that is possible to put the matter through quickly ; but I thought I had better let you know. As you are aware, I am most anxious that the whole affair should be concluded as quickly as possible—more especially, since the answer given by Major Baird to the question in the House last week.*

" I should, of course, like several days to prepare for the Inquiry, as I have not had access to the Files since I left the Office, and should have to verify various points. The people at the Registry in Mason's Yard, would only be too glad to give me every facility, I know, when I have obtained permission from Sir Maurice Bonham-Carter to do so.

" Believe me,
" Yours truly,
" (*Signed*) V. DOUGLAS-PENNANT."

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* *i.e.*, That the Air Ministry refused to publish Mr. Harmsworth's report.

"Wardenhurst,

"Ashburnham Road,

"Luton.

"November 26th, 1918.

"Dear Miss Douglas-Pennant,

"I much regret that the Elections take me away from town **before all the arrangements in connection with the Inquiry have been completed.** I have, however, left instructions at Downing Street that I am to be summoned at any time if necessary.

"I had not, in fact, seen or written to the Judge-Advocate General. I was and am awaiting precise directions before doing so.

"I understand fully your anxiety, and I can only say that there shall be no delay as far as I am concerned in making the arrangements.

"Believe me,

"Yours truly,

"(*Signed*) CECIL HARMSWORTH."

I saw Mr. Harmsworth again on December 2nd, 1918, and I told him that during his absence I had received constant messages from the Prime Minister, through his Secretary, Mr. J. T. Davies, assuring me that the arrangements for my Inquiry would shortly be completed with Lord Weir. In the course of our conversation, I could not help noticing that there was some hesitation in his manner in replying to my questions as to the progress of the arrangements for the promised Inquiry. I asked Mr. Harmsworth to tell me the true position, and whether there was any serious hitch in the matter. I reminded him that nearly a month had elapsed since he told me that he was recommending an Inquiry, and nearly a fortnight since he had informed me that the Prime Minister had decided to hold one, and that for fifteen weeks I had been under the stigma of summary dismissal without knowing the cause. Mr. Harmsworth assured me that the matter would soon be arranged. I wrote to him again to the same effect, but I heard nothing further from him.

About the middle of December it was decided that the new Ministry of Health, which was to take the place of the Insurance Commission, could not be brought into being until July of the following year. I received a telegram from the Prime Minister's Secretary, Mr. J. T. Davies, informing me of this, and asking whether I would consent to serve as an Insurance Commissioner from January, 1920, to July, 1920. I felt quite confident that the full Inquiry promised me by the Prime Minister, and for which, I was assured, arrangements were actually being made, would completely clear me, and enable me again to hold an official post with untarnished reputation. I therefore accepted, making clear, however, to Mr. J. T. Davies that my doing so was entirely subject to the Finding of the promised Court of Inquiry.

Soon after this Lord Weir's resignation was announced in the Press. On December 19th I was rung up on the telephone and told that Lord Weir had succeeded in preventing the Inquiry, and that I would shortly receive a letter from the Prime Minister's Secretary to that effect. I refused to credit this statement, and assured my informant that I placed the fullest confidence in Mr. Lloyd George's promise, which, moreover, was the word of the Prime Minister of England. On my return home, however, that night, I found the following letter from the Prime Minister's Secretary, ignoring all that had passed, and merely replying to my original letter of September 2nd, written immediately after my dismissal, to ask for an Inquiry :—

" 10, Downing Street,
" Whitehall, S.W.1.
" 17th December, 1918.

" Dear Miss Douglas-Pennant,

" I am desired by the Prime Minister to say that he has had under consideration the request made by you for an enquiry into the circumstances under which you were superseded as Commandant of the Women's Royal Air Force.

" The Prime Minister has discussed the matter very carefully with the Secretary of State for the Air Force, who alone is responsible for the administration of the W.R.A.F., and on whom

devolves the task of making what appointments he thinks fit to all the branches of the R.A.F., and the Prime Minister cannot see any reason for interfering with Lord Weir's decision in your case.

"Lord Weir admits that some lack of consideration was shown to you in the manner in which his decision to supersede you was carried out and for this he has expressed his regret to the Prime Minister. He considers, however, that this is the sole ground for any grievance which you may have, and that it is not a ground on which you could base a claim for further enquiry. Under these circumstances Mr. Lloyd George regrets that he cannot accede to your request.

"In conclusion, I am asked by the Prime Minister to express his gratitude to you for the efforts which you made in the discharge of the very difficult task which was entrusted to you when you took over the position of Commandant of the W.R.A.F., and he wishes me to express his regret that owing to the pressure on his time you have not been informed of this decision earlier.

"Yours sincerely,

"(*Signed*) J. T. DAVIES.

"The Hon. Violet Douglas-Pennant."

It was not until the first White Paper was published many months later (May, 1919) that I saw the following letter which Lord Weir wrote to the Prime Minister at this time, and which, doubtless, convinced the latter that an Inquiry was unnecessary and uncalled for :—

Copy.

"4th December, 1918.

"My dear Prime Minister,

"As a result of my conversation with you and Mr. Cecil Harmsworth on Saturday last, I have again considered very carefully the case of Miss Douglas-Pennant with a view to elucidating any ground or grievance in connection with her supersession as Commandant of the Women's Royal Air Force upon which she could with justice and reason support her request for any further enquiry.

"She received her appointment early in May, and from that time until her actual supersession I do not think she had cause to complain of the support which either I or Sir Godfrey Paine, as Master-General of Personnel, gave to her. Certainly, on two occasions, cases were brought to me of officers holding high appointments under her, who had tendered their resignation

broadly on the grounds that nothing was being done by her to secure effective reorganisation of the Service. On each occasion Sir Godfrey Paine and I agreed that Miss Pennant should be supported and the resignations accepted.

"In the middle of August she informed Sir Godfrey Paine that she could not continue to carry on her work if Colonel Bersey, head of the branch in the Air Ministry dealing with the affairs of the W.R.A.F., remained at his post. General Paine agreed to the replacement of Colonel Bersey, but informed Miss Pennant that unless marked improvement was shown in a month's time he would be forced to consider the question of her supersession. A few days later, General Paine vacated his office, and General Brancker was appointed in his place.

"I, meanwhile, had occasion again to consider the position of the Women's Royal Air Force, matters being brought to a head by an intimation which I received from Sir Auckland Geddes, then Minister of National Service, that owing to the state of disorganisation of the Force, he could no longer undertake the responsibility of allocating women to it. I came definitely to the conclusion that Miss Pennant had not been successful in obtaining the results required by the exigencies of war, and that she would not be able to overcome the difficulties which presented themselves. I was affected in this opinion by the belief that she was unable to command the co-operation of other Departments interested and of the heads of other women's services, and this I believe to be essential to the success of the organisation.*

"At the beginning of September, I therefore, myself instructed General Brancker to supersede Miss Pennant.

"On a review of these events, I am still convinced that the action which I then took was right in the interests of the Service, and the results since achieved by Miss Pennant's successor confirm this conviction. The sole reason for her supersession was that she had not been successful in securing the objects for which she had been appointed, and that there appeared no propects of her obtaining better results if she continued. I do not wish in any way to reflect on her capacity, but the qualities, which she undoubtedly possesses, were not those suited to the needs of the particular post which she held under the Air Ministry.

"It is clear, however, that a lack of consideration at least was shown to her in not waiting a further fortnight before announcing my decision to supersede her in accordance with the

*This belief was possibly due to General Brancker's untrue statement, *i.e.*, that I had complained to him that other Heads of Departments refused to co-operate (*see* pages 140, 141).

statement made by General Paine. General Paine had actually informed me verbally of this statement, but unluckily, it escaped my memory, and he happened to be out of the country at the time my decision was reached. I recognise that in this respect Miss Pennant has ground for grievance, but this, in my opinion, is the sole one, and is not a ground on which a claim for enquiry can be based. The interests of the public service clearly require that the responsible head of a department, above all in war time, should be free to supersede any official whose continuance in office, in his opinion, is not likely to secure the results which the interests of the Service require. As a matter of right, I am not aware that a commissioned officer can demand a formal enquiry in such a case, and under the terms of her contract Miss Pennant clearly cannot do so.

"I welcomed Mr. Harmsworth's appointment to enable you to form your own judgment on the case, and all the facts and relevant papers at our disposal have been laid before him.

"In view of the above considerations I am bound strongly to resist the claim which Miss Pennant had advanced to you. The acceptance of this claim would in my view set a precedent which would be disastrous in the interests of sound administration. If, therefore, Miss Pennant persists in her claim, the only course that I can advise is definitely to refuse, and to face any questions which may subsequently be raised in the Houses of Parliament.

"I am strengthened in my opposition to concession on hearing from Mr. Harmsworth that Miss Pennant threatens an agitation in the Press and by the Labour Party, unless her claim is accepted by to-morrow.

"Yours sincerely,

"(*Signed*) WEIR.

"The Right Hon. D. Lloyd George, M.P.,

"10, Downing Street, S.W.1."

Lord Weir's letter is not merely inaccurate, it is untrue, and he also repeated the same misleading statements in a letter he wrote to Mr. Winston Churchill on March 11th, 1919, just before a debate on this question, in the House of Commons. In both letters, Lord Weir gave the impression that General Paine had been dissatisfied with my work, and had warned me that unless I did better I would have to go in a month. As I have already said, and my statement is fully corroborated by General Paine, nothing of the sort ever

took place. General Paine has emphatically denied Lord Weir's account of the matter, and has repeatedly made clear that he considered my services very valuable, and that he never saw any reason to change his opinion (*see* pages 267-272).

It will be noted that in the last paragraph of Lord Weir's letter to the Prime Minister quoted above, he declares that he is "strengthened in" his "opposition to concession on hearing from Mr. Harmsworth that Miss Pennant threatens an agitation in the Press and by the Labour Party unless her claim is accepted by to-morrow." I can only deny ever having made use of such a threat. It is true that I told Mr. Harmsworth in one of our interviews that I was anxious that the arrangements for the promised Inquiry should be concluded as quickly as possible as I had waited sixteen weeks since my dismissal, and it was a difficult task to convince my indignant friends that there was no undue delay. Mr. Harmsworth asked me what particular organisations were pressing me with regard to this matter. I told him of the numerous public bodies, Men's and Women's Organisations, which included several of the leading Trades Unions, who had forwarded Resolutions to the Prime Minister and the Air Ministry, strongly urging that an Inquiry must be held. Mr. Harmsworth asked me to refer to this matter in a letter which he could show to the Prime Minister. I did not do this, however, as I had then no reason to doubt the Prime Minister's word, and was very loath to endeavour to obtain by any sort of agitation what could and should in the first instance be approached through official channels.

That Lord Weir should declare in writing that I threatened to raise this agitation unless my claim for an Inquiry "is accepted by to-morrow" is hardly consistent with what took place in an interview with the Prime Minister's Secretary. My brother and I saw Mr. J. T. Davies regarding the promised publication of Mr. Harmsworth's Report. Mr. Davies told my brother how "grateful everyone concerned was for the patience and forbearance" I had shown in what he described as the

"very prolonged and trying circumstances," and he assured us that the promised Inquiry would immediately take place (*see* pages 178, 179).

Questions were asked in the House of Commons, insisting that in fairness to me, Mr. Harmsworth's Report should be published. The Government refused to agree. This Report was seen by several people, and *it is well known, and cannot be disputed, that it was entirely in my favour, and strongly recommended that a full Inquiry should be held.* It is difficult to understand how the Government could have felt it just to withhold this Report, which would have cleared me immediately in the eyes of the public.

CHAPTER XX.

"Parliamentary Answers."

Early in the New Year, the Office of Secretary of State for Air was abolished. The Air Ministry came under the control of the War Office (Mr. Winston Churchill, Secretary of State for War) and Major-General Seely was appointed under him to the subordinate post of Air Minister. On January 8th, the following letter appeared in the daily Press :—

"MISS DOUGLAS-PENNANT'S CASE.

"To the Editor of the *Daily Telegraph*.

"Sir,

"We wish to draw attention to the fact that a serious position which affects the public service has been allowed to run on for four months unobserved and unchallenged. Miss Violet Douglas-Pennant was summarily dismissed by Major-General Brancker on August 28th, from the post of Commandant of the Women's Royal Air Force, a week after she had been assured by his predecessor, Sir Godfrey Paine, that the Air Ministry had every confidence in her, and would not allow her to resign. In answer to a question in the House of Commons on August 7th, Major Baird, on behalf of the Air Ministry, stated that the Air Ministry had every confidence in her ability and discretion. Miss Douglas-Pennant only worked one day under Major-General Brancker, during the course of which she was away in Berkshire settling a strike of over a thousand women. The next day General Brancker told her she was to leave immediately. He informed her that she was dismissed, not because she was inefficient, but because it was alleged that she was unpopular.

"We do not wish to enter into the merits of the case in this letter, but those who know Miss Douglas-Pennant's long years of work on the London Education Committee and many other public bodies are very far from satisfied with the reasons given by Major-General Brancker for his drastic action. Miss Douglas-Pennant is one of the National Health Insurance Commissioners (Wales), a post she has held for nearly seven years. We understand that she felt it her duty to tell the Prime Minister under whom she holds that office, that she could not return to that responsible post until the reason for her summary dismissal had been cleared up. The Prime Minister appointed Mr. Cecil Harmsworth, M.P., to enquire into the matter. He concluded his

investigations six weeks ago, and he strongly urged that in justice to Miss Douglas-Pennant a full enquiry should be held. Miss Douglas-Pennant was assured that this full enquiry would shortly be arranged. We now understand that the Prime Minister's Secretary has written to inform Miss Douglas-Pennant that the Prime Minister has decided not to interfere as Lord Weir does not consider that there are any grounds for an enquiry.

"What can be the reason for this *volte face*? Surely the Air Ministry would not wish to deny justice to a public servant. It is in the hope that the publication of this letter will help to unravel this mystery that we venture to ask you to find space for it in your columns.

(Signed) "Your obedient servants,

"AMPTHILL (Lord Ampthill),
"WILFRID ASHLEY (Col. W. Ashley, M.P.),
"ELLEN ASKWITH (Lady Askwith),
"NINA BOYLE (Women's Freedom League),
"FRANCES BALFOUR (Lady F. Balfour) (President, Women's Service Bureau, London Society for Women's Suffrage),
"HENRY CAVENDISH BENTINCK (Lord H. C. Bentinck, M.P.),
LOUISE CREIGHTON (Mrs. Mandell Creighton),
MARY MACARTHUR (Secretary, Women's Trade Union League),
J. H. THOMAS (Sec., National Union of Railwaymen),
D. LLEUFER THOMAS (Stipendiary Magistrate, South Wales),
E. PICTON TURBERVILLE (Vice-Chairman, Young Women's Christian Association)."

On the 18th January, 1918, the National Political League, an organisation which had strongly taken up the case in the interests of common justice and clean administration, wrote to ask General Seely to grant an Inquiry. He replied in an undated letter :—

Copy.

"Air Ministry.

"Dear Madam,

"With reference to your letter of the 18th January, forwarding a Resolution of the National Political League Executive, I have made careful enquiries into the case of The Hon. Violet Douglas-Pennant.

"The position is that this case was carefully examined personally by the late Secretary of State to the Royal Air Force, who came to the conclusion that in the best interests of the W.R.A.F. it was necessary that Miss Douglas-Pennant's connection with that Force should cease. The case subsequently came

before the Prime Minister, with the result that the action of the late Secretary of State was upheld.

"In the circumstances, I do not consider that there are any grounds for further action.

"(*Signed*) J. E. B. SEELY.

"Miss M. A. Broadhurst, M.A."

In spite of General Seely's "careful inquiries" he must have been seriously misinformed regarding the true circumstances, as this reply is misleading. There never was any "case" against me; it was rather my "case" against the Air Ministry, and no inquiry was ever held by that Department. General Seely's letter, indicating that there was something seriously wrong, necessitating my immediate removal from the Service, reflected greatly on me, and gave colour to the reports already current that I was a woman of bad reputation.

To those who are familiar with official correspondence, it will seem incredible that it should have been thought necessary to issue such a condemnatory letter, regarding an official, who up to date, had held a long and presumably good record, and who had not even been allowed to know what grounds there were for sudden dismissal. That General Seely believed that it was in the public interest to make this statement, in these terms, and cast this serious reflection on my character, points to the fact that charges far graver than "gross unpopularity" must have been brought against me, to justify his action (*see* pages 214-225, 364, 365).

On February 12th, 1919, Lord Henry Cavendish Bentinck, M.P., and Colonel Wilfrid Ashley, M.P., without my knowledge, asked General Seely for an explanation of the above letter, and insisted that he should see me. I had an interview with him the same day at the House of Commons, at which Colonel Ashley was present, and Lord Henry Bentinck for part of the time. I could not fail to be aware that General Seely was evidently awaiting the arrival of a formidable virago, as he expressed incredulity that I was the person he was expecting. He said more than once: "Surely it is not you? Why, I know you by sight. Did not we know each other

years ago. Why, I have always heard the nicest things about you."

I assured General Seely that I was the same person, who was alleged, by people I hardly knew, to have merited summary dismissal. I asked General Seely why he had made a public statement to the National Political League reflecting greatly on me. In the course of our interview, it was plain that he had been most seriously misinformed by the Air Ministry's Secretariat. He seemed unable to explain what grounds he had for writing to inform the National Political League that "in the best interests of the W.R.A.F. it was necessary that Miss Douglas-Pennant's connection with that Force should cease."

He seemed under the impression that I was merely a "candidate" who had been rejected owing to inefficiency and incompetency after a fair test, and asked to resign, in favour of other "more suitable candidates." General Seely explained to me that Lord Weir had decided to ask me to resign, as General Paine had told him that I was incapable of carrying out the work required of me, or to quote General Seely's words of "moving one little bunch of women to another little bunch," of which he understood my duties consisted. General Seely assured me that he sympathised with my disappointment; but that I must not regard my failure as a personal reflection, as no one would expect me to be capable of doing the work, and he encouraged me to hope that "perhaps, some day," I "might be able to do something else quite nicely."

Lord Henry Bentinck then intervened, and reminded General Seely that, on the contrary, General Paine, in an interview a few days before, had told him (Lord Henry Bentinck) and General Seely, that the present condition of the W.R.A.F. was, in his opinion, due to my spade work and organisation, and that General Festing* had endorsed General Paine's opinion.

I told General Seely, that I had never been asked to resign—that I had been summarily dismissed, as soon

* Succeeded Brig.-Gen. Guy Livingston as Deputy Master-General of Personnel.

as General Brancker arrived, on the alleged grounds of "gross unpopularity," though I was unaware of the slightest friction, and that the reasons he had himself just given me for my dismissal, reflected most seriously on my official career. It was plain that he had no idea that I had ever held a responsible post before, or had any sort of experience. I therefore requested that General Paine should be invited to come, to confirm or deny, the statement as to my alleged incompetency. General Seely said, however, that he had unfortunately an immediate appointment with the Prime Minister. I wrote to General Paine, and he saw me the next day, and emphatically denied ever having reported adversely on me, and later, he saw General Seely, and repeated what he had already told him—*i.e.*, that he had full confidence in my work and capabilities.

In his evidence before the House of Lords Inquiry, General Paine makes this point clear :—

"Mr. Stuart Bevan : Were you present at any interview with General Seely, when the question of Miss Douglas-Pennant's competence or incompetence was raised ?

"General Paine : Yes. I am under the impression that General Seely said he had been given to understand she was a very incompetent woman, or words to that effect.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan : Did you let that pass ?

"General Paine : I told him that I did not agree with him—that I thought that the later success—or whatever success the W.R.A.F. had, was largely due, if I remember rightly, to the spade work that Miss Douglas-Pennant had done, or words to that effect. . . . . .

"Mr. Stuart Bevan : Does that remain your opinion now ?

"General Paine : Yes.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan : You do not see any reason to change it?

"General Paine : No."

During my interview with General Seely, I asked him whether he had seen Mr. Cecil Harmsworth's report, which strongly recommended that an Inquiry should be held. General Seely seemed under the impression that I had only had a conversation with Mr. Harmsworth, and that his so-called report on my case was unfavourable,

and would not help me at all (*see* pages 178, 179, 207, 208). After General Seely had heard some of the real facts from Colonel Ashley, M.P., Lord Henry Bentinck, M.P., and myself, he promised to reconsider the question of an Inquiry, and he advised me to find out whether the Prime Minister would consent to one being held as he felt some doubt on this point. I saw the Prime Minister's Secretary later that evening, and shortly afterwards he informed me that Mr. Lloyd George had no objection if Mr. Winston Churchill consented. I was also informed that General Seely himself agreed that a full Inquiry should be held.

On February 13th, 1918, I received the following letter from General Seely. As General Seely referred to it in our interview, it is evident that he wrote it while under the impression that I had been asked to resign my appointment owing to incompetency :—

"Air Ministry, Strand, W.C.2.

"11th February, 1919.

"Dear Miss Douglas-Pennant,

"I am sorry that I have delayed answering your letter of the 31st January, in which you ask to be furnished with copies of reports which led to your dismissal. No written reports were made. You were asked to resign your appointment because Lord Weir satisfied himself, as a result of very careful enquiry, that you were not so well suited to carry out the duties of the appointment as other candidates who had more experience of that class of work.

"This decision contained no reflection on your ability, or on your capacity to fill many other posts with distinction.

"Believe me,

"Yours faithfully,

"(*Sgd.*) JOHN BERNARD SEELY.

"The Hon. Violet Douglas-Pennant."

In reply to General Seely's letter, I pointed out that I had not been asked to resign, but that leave to resign had been refused me, and a few days later I had been summarily dismissed. I again asked him to furnish me with the exact purport of the verbal reports which led to my dismissal, as the necessary written reports appeared not to exist.

General Seely's reference to "other candidates" indicates that the Air Ministry was aware that before my dismissal there was competition for the post of Commandant, W.R.A.F. (*see* pages 152, 158, 350).

On February 27th a debate took place in the House of Lords on the following questions put down by Lord Ampthill—

"To ask His Majesty's Government whether it is the fact—

"1. That Miss Violet Douglas-Pennant was summarily dismissed from her post of Commandant as well as from The Women's Royal Air Force by Major-General Sir W. S. Brancker, only a few days after Major-General Sir Godfrey Paine (the predecessor of the former in the office of Master-General of Personnel) had assured her upon her tendering her resignation that the Air Ministry had complete confidence in her, and begged that she should not resign her appointment.

"2. That the Prime Minister appointed Mr. Cecil Harmsworth to enquire into the matter.

"3. That Mr. Cecil Harmsworth recommended that in justice to Miss Douglas-Pennant a full judicial enquiry should be held.

"4. That the Prime Minister promised that such an Inquiry should be held.

"5. That the Inquiry has not yet been held, and that the Air Ministry declines to have it held; and to move for Papers."

Lord Weir was not present. Lord Londonderry, Additional Member of the Air Council, replied on behalf of the Government. During the course of his speech, it appeared that he had been as seriously misinformed regarding the true circumstances as General Seely had been. Lord Londonderry assured the House of Lords that I had not been dismissed but only superseded, and, to quote his words, "that Lord Weir wrote a letter to Miss Violet Douglas-Pennant and in a word that lady was superseded." Lord Londonderry continued: "Now I venture to come to a point which I am very willing on behalf of the Government to admit. It is that while it was supposed that a month would elapse before the Secretary of State would come to his final decision, a fortnight alone was allowed to elapse, and Miss Violet Douglas-Pennant was requested by the Secretary of State

to give up her duties." In making this statement Lord Londonderry referred constantly to a typed document. Certain Peers, however, who knew that Lord Londonderry's reply was highly inaccurate, and that *no such letter from Lord Weir existed*, insisted on being told the date of the letter quoted.

"Lord Ampthill: Will the Noble Marquis read that letter?

"Lord Londonderry: I have not got the letter with me at the moment.

"Lord Ampthill: Does it exist?

"Lord Londonderry: I have not the letter of Lord Weir with me at the moment, but I can tell the Noble Lord more or less its contents.

"Lord Ampthill: If you please."

Lord Londonderry then explained that this matter occurred during the previous administration of the Royal Air Force, and that it had only lately come to his knowledge. He then continued—

"Our desire is to elucidate the facts, and to prove them to the satisfaction of all parties concerned, so that no bitterness or misunderstanding can be left in the minds of anyone. So far as my memory goes, the letter was to the effect that there had been disorganisation in the Women's Royal Air Force; that for the present Miss Violet Douglas-Pennant did not seem to be able to co-operate with those other organisations which came naturally into close contact with the Women's Royal Air Force, and that in the interests of the Service, of which he was the representative, he deemed it best that Miss Violet Douglas-Pennant should be replaced by a successor.

"Lord Ampthill: What was the date of that letter, please?

"Lord Londonderry: I have not got the letter with me.

"Lord Ampthill: Was it subsequent or previous to the summary dismissal by Major-General Brancker?

"Lord Londonderry: I have had the letter just placed in my hands. **It is dated September 6th, 1918.**

"Lord Ampthill: **That was some time after the summary dismissal.**"

During the course of his replies Lord Londonderry was handed a letter by a messenger from the Air Ministry, but as it was dated ten days after my dismissal, and did

not contain any of the statements quoted above, Lord Londonderry, after glancing at it, refrained from reading it. The letter handed to him was a copy of Lord Weir's letter to me (*see* pages 165-166), *in which he assured me that there was nothing that reflected on my ability or capabilities*, but that certain Women's organisations would not co-operate with me (*see* page 203).

In the same debate, Lord Londonderry gave the following astonishing account of Mr. Harmsworth's Inquiry after explaining that Mr. Harmsworth had been appointed by the Prime Minister, as a member of his Secretariat, to investigate the case, Lord Londonderry proceeded—

> "I have seen Mr. Cecil Harmsworth, and had a certain amount of conversation with him in respect to this matter. He tells me that he had **an interview** with Miss Violet Douglas-Pennant, and that in the course of the interview she alleged that certain influences had been brought to bear. In fact, I think I am right in taking your Lordships into all the facts I know of the case that she was more or less the victim of a conspiracy. Mr. Cecil Harmsworth then, as I think anybody else would have done, felt that it was not a matter on which he could adjudicate, and he left the case at that moment, and said 'If this is the case as you state it, it is not a matter for me, but for some competent authority which the Prime Minister may think right to select.' That, as far as I understand, is the sole portion of the story in which Mr. Cecil Harmsworth is interested. With regard to the statement that the Prime Minister promised that such an Inquiry should be held, I can say at once that the Noble Lord [Lord Ampthill] can obtain no corroboration for that statement. I should be glad to know on what authority the Noble Lord was led to believe that the Prime Minister had agreed to the setting up of an Inquiry into the reasons for the supersession of Miss Violet Douglas-Pennant."

During the course of the debate, Lord Salisbury pointed out that he considered it very unfortunate that Lord Londonderry was not able to answer the question whether the Prime Minister had promised an Inquiry, particularly as Lord Londonderry had admitted that there had been ample notice of this question, and Lord Salisbury added—

> "I imagine that communication could have been made to the Prime Minister, and that he could have been asked whether, in

fact, he had made this promise. If the Prime Minister says he did not make the promise, the matter will, of course, fall to the ground. But there is no doubt that the impression was conveyed to my noble friend, Lord Ampthill, or to those in whose name he speaks, that the promise was not only made but repeated over and over again. **If the Prime Minister makes a promise there seems to be only one course—namely, to fulfil the promise . . . . .** I suggest with great respect and diffidence that it would be wiser to make a clean breast of the reason, and if there still seems to be need for an Inquiry, **if the Prime Minister promised an Inquiry, his promise ought to be fulfilled"** (*see* pages 179-182, 203, 207-208).

Lord Stanhope pointed out that in all cases of supersession or dismissal, an officer was always told the reason for such action. Lord Stanhope continued—

"In this case that has not happened. Why has it not happened? Was it that Miss Violet Douglas-Pennant was considered incompetent or what was the reason? As a matter of fact, if the Noble Marquis [Lord Londonderry] had produced the letter from the Minister of the Air Force [Lord Weir] we would find that this Minister wrote stating that Miss Pennant had been extremely efficient. That is hardly a reason for dismissal. He failed to produce that letter."

Lord Ampthill, in his speech, drew attention to the fact that I was dismissed, and not superseded—to quote from his speech—

"She was dismissed in an abrupt and arbitrary and insulting manner. **The letter from Lord Weir, with which the Noble Marquis** [Lord Londonderry] **endeavoured to obscure the issue, was written some time after this dismissal, and not before, and your Lordships will have noticed that the Noble Marquis was most careful not to answer the question with which I interrupted him as to the date of that letter** . . . . . This was a case of dismissal, and every Public Servant, whether in the Navy, or the Army, or the Civil Service, has the right to know the cause of his dismissal from that Service. That is a well-acknowledged and fully-recognised right, which is possessed by everybody who is in any kind of service. That is all that Miss Pennant asks for, and she asks this, not for herself—not for the sake of reparation—but because this is a question of principle.

"It is a Test Case. If we have now come to a state of things in which any Public Servant may be arbitrarily dismissed at a moment's notice, by any Jack-in-Office, and have no redress—no right of asking for the cause of dismissal—then we

have got to a state of things which has never existed in this country before, and which is intolerable."

Lord Ampthill further pointed out that the inconsistent reasons given for my dismissal, showed the necessity for an Inquiry being held. To quote from his speech—

" Various Ministers and authorities concerned have all disagreed as to the cause of dismissal. Take first of all Major-General Brancker—he told Miss Pennant that she was dismissed—not because she was inefficient—he went out of his way to say that she was very efficient—but because she was unpopular. That may or may not be a case for dismissal, but that was the sole reason given by Major-General Brancker. When Miss Pennant went to Lord Weir, he dropped that, and said that it was not the case that she was unpopular. It was because she did not get on with certain Women's Organisations. It was the first that Miss Violet Douglas-Pennant had heard about it, and to this day, no proof has been produced of friction with other Women's Organisations. That was Lord Weir's reason.

" Then we come to Major-General Seely, who had taken it over, and the reason he gave—that it was on account of Miss Pennant's inefficiency—the very thing that had been denied by the two previous authorities, who not only in their personal communications to Miss Pennant, but openly in the House of Commons, and publicly, had said that she was very efficient and capable. Now, there you have the three reasons, which of them is right ? We want to get to the bottom of it. Surely Miss Pennant has a right to be told whether she was dismissed because she was unpopular, or because she could not get on with some Women's Organisation (which has not been named), or whether she was dismissed because of inefficiency, and now she is told that unless she brings a charge of corruption—a thing which it has never entered her head to do—against somebody or something, she is not to have this elementary justice."

Lord Ampthill then reiterated his demand that the papers concerning this Case should be produced. He continued—

"It is no good telling me that there are no Papers because there must be some. No transaction of this kind takes place in a Government Office without there being something on paper.

" The Noble Marquis [Lord Londonderry] appealed to me on account of my knowledge of public offices. Yes, I know something about them, and I know the way these things are done, and I know

that it is incredible and inconceivable that any important Public Servant should be dismissed without something being in writing.

"Then we have the Report of Mr. Cecil Harmsworth. I take it that he did not report verbally to the Prime Minister, and that he must have put down something in writing. Further than that, there are the protests of a great number of Public Bodies, who have taken up this matter. A number of important Trades Unions, and other Public Bodies have been interested in this Case, not only on account of Miss Pennant's great popularity and remarkable record of public work, but **because they regard this as a Test Case. It is a Case on the decision of which depends our security for ordinary justice and fair treatment for all those in the Public Service.** I beg to remind your Lordships that I have moved for Papers."

During the Debate, Lord Londonderry said—

"I am given to understand that there is an idea in Miss Violet Douglas-Pennant's mind, and in the minds of the Noble Lords who are taking up this Case, that she has been the victim of malice, the victim of conspiracy.

"I may say on behalf of the Government that the Secretary of State will leave no stone unturned to probe that allegation to its uttermost limit. If Miss Douglas-Pennant can bring forward a *prima facie* case, in which she will state the names of individuals who are associated in this reprehensible action, gives us dates and details, give us facts, an Inquiry shall most certainly be held, and all these facts brought to light, and to the satisfaction, not only of Miss Douglas-Pennant and those Noble Lords who are supporting her, but to the satisfaction of your Lordships' House and the other House of Parliament."

In view of this pledge, I sent in the following day (February 28th, 1919) a statement drawn up by my Solicitor, which set out the reasons which caused me to urge for an Inquiry.

A few days later, however, I received a letter from Colonel Ashley, M.P., enclosing a letter from Lord Londonderry, dated February 28th, from which it appeared the Government was narrowing down the grounds on which it had pledged itself in the House of Lords to grant an Inquiry. Lord Londonderry, in his letter, asked Colonel Ashley to inform me that Mr. Churchill would gladly hold an Inquiry into a charge of corruption in some Clothing Contracts if "Miss Pennant

would furnish as soon as possible, a full and precise statement on this specific point." Lord Londonderry added a postscript to this letter, pointing out that he was signing it on behalf of Major-General J. B. Seely. My reply was as follows :—

Copy.

" Jules' Hotel,
" Jermyn Street, S.W.1.
" 4th March, 1919.

" Dear Colonel Ashley,

" Thank you for letting me see a copy of Lord Londonderry's letter, written to you on behalf of General Seely.

" As you will remember, Lord Londonderry promised, in the House of Lords, an Inquiry, provided it was understood that my complaint was that I was dismissed as a result of malice and intrigue, and I have, at the request of Mr. Winston Churchill, sent in a memorandum on this point.

" I understand that Mr. Churchill has promised to let Lord Henry Bentinck or Sir Robert Thomas have his decision to-day.

" I think there must have been some misunderstanding as to the Clothing Contract. This did not rest with me or my Department. Had it done so, I should probably have thought it necessary, in the public interest, to invite tenders in the usual way, instead of placing orders for many thousand women's coats and skirts with a firm who had admittedly never made a coat and skirt before. But this was not one of my many responsibilities.

" Yours sincerely,
" (*Signed*) V. DOUGLAS-PENNANT."

In view of Lord Londonderry's misleading statement in the House of Lords on February 27th, regarding the letter he declared Lord Weir had written to me before my dismissal, informing me that he was dissatisfied with my administration, Lord Ampthill put down questions, challenging Lord Londonderry to explain this matter, as it was well known that no such letter from Lord Weir existed.

Lord Curzon, on behalf of the Government, requested Lord Ampthill to postpone the date of these questions, in order to facilitate certain other business. Lord Ampthill consented, and put down his questions for a later date ; but Lord Londonderry, however, asked him to withdraw them, on the ground that he particularly wished to go abroad on the day fixed.

CHAPTER XXI.

Mr. Churchill's Startling Statements.

On the 5th March, 1919, I received a letter from the Secretary of the Air Ministry, Mr. (now Sir William) Robinson, informing me that the statements I had sent in on February 28th, did not, in Mr. Winston Churchill's opinion, meet the terms laid down by Lord Londonderry on February 27th. In this letter, Mr. Robinson made clear that, in order to obtain an Inquiry, I must establish "a prima facie case of corruption or malice against named individuals."

I therefore sent in a supplementary statement on March 6th, 1919. On the same day, a letter from Lord Ampthill appeared in the Press, drawing attention to the fact that the Government had promised definitely to grant an Inquiry on condition that I made an allegation of malice or conspiracy, and he added :—

> **"If Parliament does not insist on its fulfilment, we are at the end of honour and justice in public life. It is above all necessary that the public should realise that this is a question of principle—far more than that of justice to an individual. The contention that it is better that one person should suffer injustice than that forty other persons should be shown up in a discreditable affair cannot carry weight with those who hold that justice should be no respecter of persons."**

On March 13th, the matter was raised in the House of Commons, and strong pressure was brought to bear on the Government to grant an Inquiry. Several members of the Coalition and Labour Parties took part in this Debate, which was very animated. Among the speakers who urged that an Inquiry should be held were :—Lord Henry Cavendish Bentinck (Coalition Unionist), Brig.-General Sir Owen Thomas (Labour), Sir Robert Thomas, Bart. (Coalition Liberal), Mr. J. Hinds (Coalition Liberal), Sir D. S. Davies (Coalition Liberal), Mr. Thomas Davies (Coalition Unionist), Mr. Harold Smith, K.C. (Coalition Unionist), Mr. Hayday (Labour), Sir Frederick Banbury (Coalition Unionist), and Mr. J. H. Thomas (Labour).

The following extracts from the speeches show that all those were fully aware that I did not regard the matter of my dismissal as a personal grievance; but that my supporters and I were pressing for an Inquiry as a matter of principle and in the interests of a clean Government Service.

Lord Henry Bentinck (Nottingham South), emphasised this point, saying :—

> " This question is not merely a personal one. The dismissal of Miss Douglas-Pennant goes to the very root of the Public Service, and the treatment which was accorded to her really undermines that confidence which justice and fairness ought to inspire. Miss Douglas-Pennant was ostensibly dismissed because of the exigencies of the Public Service . . . but the real reason is, that she, from the very first, was the victim of a conspiracy, and an intrigue, and Lord Weir, instead of supporting her in her efforts to secure the efficiency of the Service, got rid of her, and thereby supported and condoned the actions of those who were obstructing the efficiency of the Public Service. Miss Pennant was no untried person—she had a long and distinguished career of Public Service, and her efficiency and capacity as an Insurance Commissioner, has won for her the affection and esteem of the whole of the people of Wales . . . She found she was up against a corrupt clique of people who were running the Women's Air Force at that time, who were determined that it should be run in an inefficient way or not at all . . .
>
> " It would be more honest to say, and I hope my Rt. Hon. Friend will say, that the efficiency of the Service of the present day, to a very large extent is due to the excellent spade-work put in by Miss Pennant when she was there. I think it is really deplorable that she was not allowed to carry on her work . . . Miss Pennant was not dismissed for any inefficiency or unpopularity; but she was dismissed simply and solely because she was not allowed to have a fair chance, and because she was up against this corrupt clique of people who put every obstacle in her way. She was a victim of malice, intrigue, and conspiracy, and I think it is a monstrous thing for a Department to say that she was either unpopular or inefficient, because she was neither."

Brig.-General Sir Owen Thomas (Anglesey) reminded the House that I had been dismissed without any adverse Report from my Senior Officer, and without the month's notice laid down in the Regulations, as necessary in all

cases, excepting in one which merits summary dismissal for serious misconduct. He referred to the fact that Lord Londonderry had said that Lord Weir had written to me, before I was dismissed, informing me that he had decided to supersede me.

To quote from Brig.-General Thomas' speech :—

> "Lord Londonderry was asked for the date of that letter. He gave the date as the 6th September, a fortnight after Miss Pennant had been dismissed. Miss Douglas-Pennant, however, knows nothing at all about that letter. **It is altogether an imaginary letter. This, therefore, is a very extraordinary case. Apparently the Officials have got somebody to shield.** What harm would be done to anyone if an Inquiry were held ?
>
> "The innocent would not suffer. Miss Douglas-Pennant has been dismissed with a stigma attaching to her, and that is unbearable to any lady who has done what she has done in the service of her country for the last twenty years."

Sir Robert Thomas (Wrexham) pointed out that not only had the necessary facilities for enabling me to carry on my work been withheld—such as accommodation and equipment for housing and training the women, but that I had been threatened that my dismissal would be brought about, unless I consented to post certain unsuitable and inexperienced women (one of whom was Brig.-General Livingston's sister). To quote Sir Robert Thomas' words :—

> "Verily, the prophecy was verified, and she was turned into the street, and by whom, we want to find out, and for what, we want to find out. Can anybody say there was not a conspiracy—a deep-rooted conspiracy, with malice behind it, to prevent this lady from performing her duty, and to uphold a system of corruption in the Air Service."

He also drew the attention of the House to the fact that in view of the Pledge given by the Government in the House of Lords, I had already sent in two statements giving my grounds for demanding an Inquiry, and that so far an Inquiry had been refused. Sir Robert Thomas added :—

> "The hon. member for Luton [Mr. Cecil Harmsworth] was requested by the Prime Minister to make an Inquiry into this matter, in order to advise him whether, in his opinion, judicial

Inquiry should be held. The hon. member for Luton made this Inquiry. He gave his Report to the Prime Minister, and on that Report, the Prime Minister said he would grant a judicial Inquiry. I suppose that that is not denied ? If it is, I have letters here which support it. The Prime Minister said that Miss Pennant should have a judicial Inquiry—Lord Weir intervened and the Inquiry was stopped. Why ? If the cause of this lady is not a just cause—if she has been guilty of an offence—if she has been guilty of misconduct involving instant dismissal, why all this mystery, why all this shuffling, and why, ultimately, should the Prime Minister be made to go back on his pledged word, to grant her an Inquiry ? It is a monstrous injustice . . . I am a supporter of the Government ; but on this matter I will certainly vote against the Government . . .

" Mr. Winston Churchill has asked Miss Pennant to give him particulars of these charges. Miss Pennant has done so. Here they are. She sent in one statement. It was not specific enough. Another statement was sent in—that was not sufficiently specific. I am perfectly convinced, that if she goes on sending in statements from now until Doomsday, every one will meet with the same fate . . .

" Why should we trust the Minister for Air to be the sole arbiter in this matter ? "

Mr. J. Hinds (Carmarthen) strongly supported the demand for an Inquiry. To quote from his speech :—

" Because of the good services rendered in every Welsh matter by Miss Pennant in the past. We have evidence of what she has done . . . I support it because we are losing the services of a very able servant from Wales, if that stigma is not removed . . . . .

" No private firm would dismiss a servant at a moment's notice in this way. If it did, it would be held up to obliquy. On the ground of Miss Pennant's services in the past in Wales, I support the appeal."

Sir D. S. Davies (Denbigh) in a maiden speech, strongly urged that an Inquiry must be held. He said :—

" I have known Miss Douglas-Pennant for some years in connection with the Insurance Commission. I have been and am Chairman of the Insurance Committee of my County, and I have met Miss Pennant often with the other Commissioners. I have no hesitation in saying that she is a very capable Public Servant. She is a lady of great tact, good judgment, and one with whom it is easy to get on with on all occasions, although it is not always easy

to get on with the Insurance Commissioners. I remarked especially with what tact Miss Douglas-Pennant manages a very difficult situation. From my own knowledge of this lady's work for many years, and from the statements that have been made, which I believe are absolutely true, a sufficient case has been made out for an Inquiry.

"That is all we ask. Any servant is entitled to have an Inquiry. Her character is at stake in this matter. Summary dismissal is a very delicate matter. I am fully convinced from my knowledge of Miss Douglas-Pennant's services, that a full Inquiry should be held. There is a great feeling in the country where she is known, that she has not been fairly dealt with."

Mr. Thomas Davies (Cirencester) also pressed for an Inquiry, on the grounds that certain matters ought to be cleared up. He pointed out that it had been stated during the Debate that one of the Officers in the W.R.A.F. (Colonel Bersey) was actually promoted from 2nd Lieut. to a Lieut.-Colonel at one bound, and that for the fair name of the Air Service, the demand for an Inquiry was justified.

Mr. Harold (now Sir Harold) Smith, K.C. (Warrington), also urged that in the interests of the Public Service, an Inquiry ought to be held.

Maj.-General Seely (Under Secretary of State for Air) then intervened on behalf of the Air Ministry, and informed the House that

"An Inquiry cannot take place, unless it can be shown that there was malice or corruption on the part of the authority."

In reply to a question from a Member, as to whether I was dismissed because it was said I was unpopular, and not because I was inefficient, Major-General Seely replied :—

"It was never said she was inefficient—in fact, it was expressly said she was most efficient."

He went so far as to say that in—

"the opinion of the competent authority, Miss Douglas-Pennant was one of the most competent and efficient ladies in England or Wales . . . There are not words strong enough to say how highly I regard Miss Douglas-Pennant and the services she has rendered to the State."

This assurance of General Seely's did not carry much weight with some of his hearers, as it was in direct contradiction to Lord Londonderry's statement on behalf of the Air Ministry in the House of Lords on February 27th, *i.e.*, that I had been removed from my post owing to inefficiency. It was still more strikingly incompatible with General Seely's previous statement to Lord Henry Bentinck, that I was "a very incompetent woman," and it will be remembered that General Seely had himself assured me a short time ago in an interview with Colonel Ashley and Lord Henry Bentinck, that my dismissal was due to the fact that General Paine had informed Lord Weir that I was "incapable of moving one little bunch of women to another little bunch of women," of which, he alleged, my duties consisted.*

In his speech General Seely stated that Lord Weir "took the full responsibility," and that he (Lord Weir) carefully considered who was the best person, and that "she was emphatically not the best fitted to be Head of the W.R.A.F.," and he, therefore, decided to "tell General Brancker to dismiss Miss Douglas-Pennant." General Seely added, "there is no charge against her," but he explained that Lord Weir arrived at this decision as he believed "another lady could do it better."

General Seely, when challenged as to why the Prime Minister's promise had not been kept regarding the Inquiry, replied :—

> "I do not think the Prime Minister granted this Inquiry but as he is not here, I cannot verify it."

It cannot be easily understood why the responsible Minister in charge of the Air Ministry, had been unable, during the course of nearly three months since he assumed office, to ascertain from the Prime Minister, or his Private Secretary, or from Mr. Cecil Harmsworth, who sat beside him on the Treasury Bench, the true facts concerning the Prime Minister's pledge (*see* pages 179-181).

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*General Seely cannot have been aware that the Department, M.3, was solely responsible for "posting" and moving the W.R.A.F.

In view of the mystery surrounding the case, several Members of Parliament insisted that they should be informed as to the true cause. Sir Frederick Banbury (City of London) drew attention to the fact that so far no reason whatever had been given.

He said, in the course of his speech :—

"Everybody who has sat in the House with me knows that I am the last person to decry discipline, or to say that an Officer in Command, or a Secretary of State, cannot, if he chose, supersede or dismiss any person whom he thinks is incompetent. But my right hon. and gallant friend goes out of his way to say that this is a most competent lady . . .

"Major-General Seely : Not for this job.

"Sir F. Banbury : That is what we want to find out. How is it that such a very exceptional person, who is so competent, is not particularly competent for this job in which, unfortunately, she has been superseded. I do not know the rights or wrongs of the case, but it is perfectly clear that an Inquiry is justified. What has the right hon. and gallant gentleman (General Seely) to be afraid of ? If it turns out that this lady was not competent for this post, there is an end of the matter. If, on the other hand, it turns out that she was, is it not right that we should find that out ? Everybody knows that there have been charges of favouritism and malice . . . I am quite certain that my right hon. and gallant friend does not wish to shield anybody from the effects of his action. In these circumstances, I trust that this Committee will insist upon an Inquiry. We have had quite enough about a *prima facie* case—what we want is a very simple thing. Here is a lady who has been superseded. It is generally thought without any ostensible cause, and in those circumstances there shall be an Inquiry."

Mr. J. H. Thomas stated that he had been one of the signatories to a letter to the Press (*see* pages 188, 189) demanding an Inquiry and the publication of Mr. Harmsworth's report. He drew attention to the significant fact that this Report which entirely exonerated me had been withheld :—

"We have strong grounds for knowing that that Report was entirely in favour of Miss Pennant. I have no hesitation in declaring across the floor that I am certain it was, and that it exonerated her from all blame ; but, curiously enough, whatever questions were asked in the House by hon. members, and although

all manner of pressure was applied in order that that Report should be published, up till now it has been positively refused.

"Suppose for a moment that that Report condemned the lady, and justified the action of the Department, I venture to assert, that there would not be a second question in this House, but that the Department would produce the Report, in order to prove their own action.

"I submit the House of Commons is entitled to-day, at least, to see that Report, and that Report is not forthcoming. It appears to me that there is only one course open for my right hon. friend (Mr. Winston Churchill) because it will be a very dangerous situation for him. **This is not one lady, this is a principle affecting everybody under the jurisdiction of the War Office involved in this, and there is a question of justice, whether it be to an officer or a private involved, and after all, when we talk of discipline, no one, and rightly, tries to enforce it more than the War Office. It affects the honour of this lady; it strikes absolutely at the fundamental principle of our public life, that justice must be done at the top and at the bottom."**

General Seely's speech did not throw any light on the mystery. His definite statement that inefficiency was in no way the cause of dismissal, coupled with his letter to the National Political League (*see* pages 189, 190), *i.e.*, that the Secretary of State "came to the conclusion that in the best interests of the W.R.A.F. it was necessary that Miss Douglas-Pennant's connection with that Force should cease," and that the Prime Minister had upheld Lord Weir's action, only tended to arouse grave apprehension in the minds of certain people that there was some serious charge against me, which was being withheld from the public.

Mr. Winston Churchill (War Minister) then intervened, and made a series of startling statements, which certainly might be described not as "terminological inexactitudes" but as "absolute inaccuracies."

He gave the House to understand that Lord Weir had supported me in spite of my constantly confronting him with a succession of difficulties and complaints, and that at last Lord Weir said.—

"I shall not support them any more. I am going to make a change."

Mr. Churchill went on to say:—

"That may have been a harsh decision, but it is a perfectly reasonable and comprehensible one in time of peace or in time of war. . . . . .

"**Lord Weir after informing himself, personally, as he was bound to do in an important matter like this through every channel he could,** decided that Miss Douglas-Pennant should be superseded. He did that in the interests of the Women's Royal Air Force, and he put somebody in her place in order that the interests of the Force might be advanced."

Mr. Churchill's statement that Lord Weir was constantly confronted with difficulties and complaints, and supported me until he decided to do so no longer, is absolutely untrue, as I never made any complaints whatever, excepting in one interview to ask him, as it was my duty to do, to provide me with adequate accommodation for training Officers, and also to permit me to know when and where women were being drafted to Air Force Camps. At the end of this interview, Lord Weir expressed himself as entirely satisfied with the policy I was pursuing. He thanked me for my efforts, and expressed his confidence.

Mr. Winston Churchill also declared that there *had been friction between the Air Ministry and the Ministry of National Service.* He said "things were not going well. If it is not common ground it is indisputable."

As to whether Mr. Winston Churchill is accurate on this point I am unable to judge. If any such friction existed between the two Ministries I was not aware of it, as I never had any dealings with the Ministry of National Service. Recruiting was not part of my duty, and was entirely in the hands of Colonel Bersey under Brigadier-General Livingston, and of a temporary Officer, Colonel Williams, who, it will be remembered, was specially selected by the Ministry of Labour to represent that Department as Liaison Officer on Colonel Bersey's staff (*see* pages 110, 114, 118).

Mr. Winston Churchill then informed the House that the *Minister of National Service, Sir Auckland Geddes,*

"was acquainted with all that took place, and thoroughly concurred at the time in Lord Weir's action, and thought that it was necessary in the interests of the Women's Royal Air Force."

That Sir Auckland Geddes should have thought it necessary to insist on my dismissal from the W.R.A.F. to mark his disapproval of friction between his Department, with which I never had any dealings, and a Department of the Air Ministry over which I had no jurisdiction, must appear to many fair-minded people as eminently unjust and indefensible. During the House of Lords Inquiry, however, it transpired that other influences had been brought to bear on Sir Auckland Geddes (*see* pages 357-372).

Members of the House expressed themselves as highly dissatisfied with Mr. Churchill's explanation—cries of " shuffling " were heard.

In the course of the Debate, Lord Henry Cavendish Bentinck said—

> " I do assert most confidently that Miss Pennant was the victim of a corrupt intrigue by men who were obstructing her in the performance of her duty, and in her efforts to make the Air Force efficient, and that Lord Weir instead of supporting her threw his influence on the side of the people who obstructed her. Will you kindly give an Inquiry into that now or not ? "

I saw General Paine the following day, and he declared emphatically that *during the time he was Master-General of Personnel, and I was Commandant, W.R.A.F., we never had any dealings with the Ministry of National Service, so far as the W.R.A.F. was concerned.* As regards the friction alleged by Mr. Churchill and Sir Auckland Geddes to have existed between the Air Ministry and the Ministry of National Service, General Paine informed me that when he vacated the post of Master-General of Personnel, he received a letter from the Minister of National Service thanking him warmly for the great help he and his Department had given in dealing with the difficult problem of recruiting men to meet the man-power shortage. A few days later, I happened to meet Lady Rhondda at luncheon at a

Club. It must be remembered that I had no idea at the time that Lady Rhondda had taken part in my dismissal (*see* pages 147, 371-372). I asked her how it was that Mr. Winston Churchill could have made such a highly inaccurate statement regarding the alleged disputes and friction with the Ministry of National Service. I told her that when I heard his statement in the House I felt as much surprised as if he had accused me of having been the cause of friction with some Colonial Government Department overseas, of which I had never heard.

Lady Rhondda agreed that I had not had any dealings with National Service. I asked her whether she could take steps to correct the unfounded statement which reflected so unjustly on me, and I suggested that in her own interests, in view of the pending Inquiry, she should dissociate herself as a late official of National Service from any connection with Mr. Churchill's and Sir Auckland Geddes' mis-statement of fact. Lady Rhondda said that she would read the Report of the Debate. I met her again at a Club shortly afterwards, and she astonished me by saying that she supposed I knew that she had gone with Dame K. Furse to see Lord Weir about me. I told her that I had no knowledge of it, and I asked her to explain exactly what she meant as I was quite in the dark. We were interrupted, however, and I did not see her again. It was not until June that her letter appeared in *The Times* (*see* page 168), shortly after the publication of the White Paper which revealed for the first time the fact that she had written a secret and misleading Report. *In spite of this letter, in which she admitted that at the time of my dismissal she was responsible for advising Sir Auckland Geddes on this matter, Lady Rhondda in her evidence in the House of Lords Inquiry declared that she neither directly nor indirectly brought about my dismissal or influenced Lord Weir or other persons* (*see* pages 372-373).

CHAPTER XXII.

Campaign of Calumny.

After the Debate in the House of Commons on March 13th, every effort was made to bring about an Inquiry, as Mr. Winston Churchill's untrue statement regarding the reason for my dismissal had made a very bad impression.

On April 16th, a Public Meeting was held in Wales at Bangor, where I was well known, presided over by the Mayor. The speakers included men of all shades of religious and political thought, among them were :—

The Bishop of St. Asaph (now Archbishop of Wales),
The Bishop of Bangor,
The Rev. Dr. John Williams (Nonconformist Chaplain-Gen.),
Sir Harry Reichel (Principal University College, N. Wales), and
Mr. R. T. Jones (Secretary of the Quarrymen's Union).

The Bishop of St. Asaph, among other speakers, pointed out that the question of my dismissal for no better reasons than alleged "unpopularity" involved the tenure and security upon which men and women worked in Government Services. The Bishop added that the honour of the Air Force was involved, and he moved the following resolution :—

> "That this Meeting, representative of all sections of the Community, desires to impress upon the Government the urgent necessity and justice of a full Inquiry of a judicial character into the case of The Hon. Violet Douglas-Pennant, and **they do so not only in her interest, but in that of pure administration, and in justice to the women employed in Government Service.**"

In the course of his speech, the Bishop noted that Lord Weir had admitted when he ordered my dismissal on the grounds of gross unpopularity that I was "one of the most competent and efficient women in England and Wales." When quoting these words the Bishop

asked the pertinent question, "*Is there a woman in the case; are there several women?*"

Mr. R. T. Jones (Secretary of the Quarrymen's Union) alluded to the unusual mixture of parties on the platform. We are all interested, he said, in the case

> **"which affects the working men more than any other class of the community. It was a fight for the democracy which Miss Douglas-Pennant was making. It would be the fault of the public if they allowed this injustice to go unpunished; and if it were allowed to go unchallenged, then the principle for which the War was fought would be lost. Our liberties were at stake, and what had been done to Miss Douglas-Pennant might be done to the working classes."**

The Resolution was carried unanimously, and copies were sent to the Prime Minister, Lord Weir, Mr. Winston Churchill, and General Seely from this Meeting, as well as from organisations all over the country, demanding an Inquiry.

On the same day (April 16th), Mr. J. H. Thomas, M.P. (N.U.R.), and Mr. T. Richards (Chairman, Miners' Federation) asked questions in the House of Commons to press for the publication of Mr. Harmsworth's Report and to urge for an Inquiry. To the surprise of many members, Mr. Tyson Wilson, M.P., asked a supplementary question, in which he stated that he had received letters from certain of my "opponents*" which he claimed ought also to be published. I was quite in the dark as to what letters Mr. Tyson Wilson referred to, as I had not at that time ever seen him, or heard that he had been approached by Mrs. Beatty, Miss Pratt, and Miss Andrew, in the course of their agitation to bring about my dismissal. Immediately after this Debate, before I could make any inquiries, the House of Commons adjourned for the Easter Recess.

I soon realised, however, that owing to Lord Weir's action not only my official, but my personal, reputation was seriously attacked.

Early in May, I received the following letter from the National Political League, who had taken up my

* Newspaper reports say "opponents"; Hansard, "subordinates."

case in what they held to be the interests of justice and clean government.

" National Political League
" and
" National Land Council,
" Bank Buildings,
" 16, St. James' Street, S.W.1.
" 1st May, 1919.

" Dear Miss Douglas-Pennant,

" In our efforts to further the cause of your Inquiry I think I have always made it clear to you that our Organisation is entirely disinterested. The Executive, having gone into the Case, considered that on the evidence before them, a grave injustice had been done to a responsible official, whose position and influence affected the welfare of many thousands of women subordinates of different ranks.

" You will, therefore, understand what a shock both Miss Farquharson and I received when on Wednesday last, April 30th, Mr. Tyson Wilson, the Whip of the Labour Party, in an interview at the House of Commons, informed us that he knew, on the authority of the Secretary of the Ministry concerned, that complaints made against your administration and character previous to your dismissal had been drastically investigated.

" Also, that you yourself had been given the fullest opportunity of hearing and answering such complaints, and had been unable to do so. Further, **that the charges so dealt with were such that no responsible official of any Department could do otherwise than, after investigation of their truth, decide on a summary dismissal. Your previous record, which you have always led us to understand was thoroughly satisfactory, we were informed was not so, and that, in fact, it would be wise for us in your interests, as well as our own, to cease activity on your behalf.**

" I feel it right to inform you of this at once, and to ask you for an explanation. You will understand that it is necessary for a responsible Organisation of our standing to be absolutely clear as to the facts on which its actions are based. I must ask, therefore, for an immediate reply. I should inform you that I have also written on these points to Major-General J. E. B. Seely, Under-Secretary of the Air Ministry, with whom I have previously corresponded on your case.

" Yours faithfully,

" (*Signed*) MARY ADELAIDE BROADHURST,
" *President, National Political League.*"

Though I had heard rumours I had put them aside as preposterous, and it was now for the first time that I realised that I was seriously accused of being not only a spy in the pay of the Germans, but a woman of bad reputation.

The National Political League had already been made uneasy by General Seely's undated letter, in reply to their letter of January 18th, 1919 (*see* page 189). At the time, however, they had accepted my word unreservedly that no Inquiry had taken place, and that I had never been informed of what I had been accused behind my back. I replied to the letter of May 1st from the National Political League as follows :—

Copy.

" Jules' Hotel,
" Jermyn Street, S.W. 1,
" 5th May, 1919.

" Dear Miss Broadhurst,

" I am obliged to you for your letter.

" I fully realise that as President of your Association, you feel the responsibility of having taken up the cause of one who is now reported to you to be utterly unworthy of your support.

" I am astonished to learn that at a recent interview with Mr. Tyson Wilson, M.P., you were informed by him that he had been officially advised by the Secretary of the Air Ministry that I knew of the charges made against me before I was summarily dismissed from the Air Force, and that before my dismissal, an Inquiry into these charges was made, and that I was given a full opportunity of hearing and answering the charges, and showed myself unable to make an adequate defence.

" I can only tell you that there is not one word of truth in any of these statements.

" I am,
" Yours faithfully,
(*Signed*) VIOLET DOUGLAS-PENNANT."

I also had an interview with the Chairman and Secretary of the National Political League. They told me that they had called on Mr. Tyson Wilson at the House of Commons, after seeing that he had asked questions with reference to letters from my "opponents." They were puzzled as to why Mr. Tyson Wilson, the Labour Party Whip, asked an adverse supplementary question when

Mr. J. H. Thomas and other Leaders of the Labour Party were urging for an Inquiry.

The officials of the National Political League were greatly concerned when Mr. Tyson Wilson warned them on no account to have anything to do with my case, as it would bring them, he alleged, into disrepute. He told them that he had received both letters and visits at the House of Commons from Mrs. Beatty and, he believed, Miss Pratt, and that they had made such serious charges against my administration and character that he had taken the letters to the Air Ministry, and had insisted that for the sake of the W.R.A.F. I must be dismissed. Mr. Tyson Wilson said that he interviewed Major Baird, the Parliamentary Secretary, who, he alleged, assured him that the matter was very serious, and should be thoroughly investigated. Mr. Tyson Wilson declared that the Secretary of the Air Ministry had informed him later that a full Inquiry had been held, that I had been given every opportunity of hearing the accusations and of clearing myself, but that I was forced to admit the charges, and that Lord Weir had no choice but to dismiss me instantly (*see* pages 153, 368-369).

The Chairman of the National Political League asked Mr. Tyson Wilson what these allegations were. He told them that it was impossible to tell ladies, but that if the facts were known I could never hold up my head again. When questioned as to whether he realised that up to the moment of my joining the W.R.A.F. I had been for nearly seven years a National Health Insurance Commissioner (Wales), and before that a co-opted member of the London County Council Education Committee, and many other public bodies, Mr. Tyson Wilson assured the officials of the National Political League, that it had been discovered by the Air Ministry that my record was "by no means so bright as represented."

Mr. Tyson Wilson emphasised the point that in view of these facts he had warmly supported Mrs. Beatty and Miss Pratt's agitation, and he declared that he took credit for having assisted in influencing the Air Ministry to dismiss me.

After discussing the matter with my friends and myself, the National Political League told me that they accepted my assurances unreservedly, and that they were determined to do their utmost to help me to secure a full Inquiry into a scandal which was becoming more acute every day. They gave me a copy of a letter they had addressed to Mr. Tyson Wilson, enclosing a memo. of their interview with him, and also a copy of the following letter to General Seely.

Copy.

" National Political League,
and
" National Land Council,
" Bank Buildings,
" 16, St. James's Street
" S.W. 1.
" May 5th, 1919.

" Dear General Seely,

" I am writing to you on an important point which has arisen during the last few days, in reference to the Inquiry as regards the summary dismissal of Miss Douglas-Pennant. As I think you are aware, our League took up the cause of Miss Douglas-Pennant from the entirely disinterested motive of seeing justice done. The Executive, after careful deliberation, considered that a grave injustice had been done to a responsible officer, whose position and influence affected the welfare of many thousands of women.

" I was, therefore, greatly surprised when I was told by Mr. Tyson Wilson, the Whip of the Labour Party, in an interview with him at the House of Commons on Wednesday, April 30th, that he had been officially informed by the Secretary of the Department concerned, after he had sent to that Department letters of ' complaint ' which he had himself received from ladies working under Miss Douglas-Pennant, that a drastic Enquiry was made into the alleged ' complaints.' Also, that Miss Douglas-Pennant was, in that enquiry, given the fullest opportunity of hearing and answering such charges, and failed to clear herself. The Secretary of the Department concerned then informed Mr. Tyson Wilson, that after this thorough investigation, no responsible official of any Department could decide otherwise than on immediate summary dismissal of the officer concerned.

" I find on referring to your communication to me dated January 20th, that you use the words—' The position is that this

case was carefully examined personally by the late Secretary of State for the Royal Air Force who came to the conclusion that in the best interests of the W.R.A.F. it was necessary that Miss Douglas-Pennant's connection with that Force should cease. The case subsequently came before the Prime Minister with the result that the action of the late Secretary of State was upheld.'

"You will realise that Mr. Tyson Wilson's statements to me completely confirm your own communication as quoted above, although at the time, Miss Douglas-Pennant succeeded in convincing me that no such Enquiry was held, and that, on the contrary, she was even then unaware of the cause of her dismissal.

"You will understand that the National Political League as a responsible body must be absolutely clear on the matter. Otherwise, it might find itself acting against those very principles of justice which it exists to maintain. Under the circumstances, therefore, I should be much obliged if you would kindly let me have at once the exact position as to the Enquiry which, it is alleged, preceded the summary dismissal of Miss Douglas-Pennant.

"I enclose the communication which I thought it just to send immediately to Miss Douglas-Pennant, and which I consider it only right that you should see.

"Yours sincerely,

"(*Signed*) MARY ADELAIDE BROADHURST."

General Seely did not reply until May 15th, when he said that Mr. Tyson Wilson "did not in fact make any statement as to information having been supplied to him by the Secretary of the Air Ministry" (*see* pages 224-225).

Mr. Tyson Wilson was pointed out to me in the House of Commons shortly after I received the letter from the National Political League. The Secretary of that League was with me at the time. I went up and asked Mr. Tyson Wilson if he would tell me why I had been dismissed summarily from the W.R.A.F. as I was quite in the dark, and I understood that he had helped to bring it about, believing it to be necessary to do so in the public interest.

Mr. Tyson Wilson, who did not know me, showed the greatest surprise when he heard my name, as he said that he had been assured that I was an insolent autocrat and a great overbearing bully, who dismissed people most unjustly, and would not listen to reason.

He told me that his authority had been Mrs. Beatty, and, he believed, "a Miss Pratt," and his account of the visits and letters he had received from them tallied with that which he had given to the National Political League, though he denied having said that I was a woman of immoral character.

I told Mr. Tyson Wilson that it seemed very unjust, and unworthy of the Whip of the Labour Party, which stands for fair play and justice, that he should have accepted the word of total strangers without any inquiry, and urged the Air Ministry to dismiss me. Mr. Tyson Wilson assured me that he had seen Major Baird, and he believed Mr. Robinson, Secretary to the Air Ministry (now Sir A. W. Robinson), and that they had told him that a full Inquiry had been held before my dismissal, and that I had been given every opportunity of clearing myself, but had been unable to do so. When he heard that this was not the case, Mr. Tyson Wilson seemed somewhat perturbed, and told me that he wished that he had seen me before he took action, as if I had applied to him for help he would willingly have assisted me instead of Mrs. Beatty. I assured Mr. Tyson Wilson that I had no idea that this intrigue was going on behind my back as I had been far too busy to think of anything but my work (*see* pages 385-386).

A few days later (May 8th), Captain J. P. Cherry, M.C. (late Royal Air Force), who had been attached to Colonel Bersey's Staff at W.R.A.F. Headquarters, interviewed Mr. Tyson Wilson at the House of Commons. Mr. Tyson Wilson warned him not to have anything to do with me, alleging that I was a very bad woman, not only a bully and virago, but immoral, and that the women in the Air Force had threatened to mutiny as no decent woman could serve under me.

Captain Cherry, who had worked with me, knew that this statement was untrue, and that the friendliest relations existed between the staff and myself, and those of the W.R.A.F. whom I had the opportunity of meeting personally. He came to see me the next day,

May 9th, and told me how serious the slander was that was being spread apparently to prevent an Inquiry being held. He asked me to come with him at once to the House of Commons to see Mr. Tyson Wilson, in order to request the latter to repeat to my face what he had stated behind my back.

I went to the House of Commons with Captain Cherry, and Mr. Tyson Wilson denied having made any reflection on my personal character, though he again told us about Mrs. Beatty's visit and letters urging him to bring about my dismissal. Mr. Tyson Wilson again repeated his assurance that he only wished he had seen what "I was like sooner as he would not have taken any action against me, on the contrary, he would have given me every assistance."

The following statement was taken down from Captain Cherry, immediately after his first interview with Mr. Tyson Wilson, M.P. :—

> "On the 8th May, 1919, I had an interview with Mr. Tyson Wilson, M.P., in the lobby of the House of Commons, with reference to Miss Douglas-Pennant. In the course of the interview, Mr. Tyson Wilson stated that he had received a number of letters from various people, bearing on this Case, and also had interviews with different people, and among those who had written to him was Mrs. Beatty. In consequence of these, he had come to the conclusion that Miss Douglas-Pennant must be an immoral woman, and that no decent women should serve under her if the information that had been given him was true. He insisted that Miss Douglas-Pennant's past record must have been an extremely bad one, and that in the interests of the lady herself, it was advisable that her friends should cease to press for an Inquiry, particularly in view of the fact, that Mr. Tyson Wilson had been assured by the Secretary of the Air Ministry, that a full Inquiry had been held into the charges made against Miss Douglas-Pennant, previous to her dismissal. That she had been given every opportunity of defending herself—but, having failed to do so, was summarily dismissed.
>
> "Mr. Tyson Wilson's attitude appeared to me very indifferent and detached, and he made it clear to me that he did not wish to have anything further to do with the affair.
>
> "The following day, 9th May, I again had an interview with Mr. Tyson Wilson in the lobby of the House of Commons. Miss Douglas-Pennant accompanied me. Mr. Tyson Wilson, at

that interview, denied having mentioned the word 'immoral'; but I said there was not the slightest doubt that he had done so. I also said to him, that I thought it was very unfair that a lady should be slandered in this manner without having a chance of defending herself, as I knew Miss Douglas-Pennant to be a very capable, efficient, and courteous lady.

"As I was about to leave, Mr. Tyson Wilson said that if Miss Douglas-Pennant had brought her Case before him in the first instance, he would certainly have given her every assistance; but that Mrs. Beatty had been the first to bring the Case to his notice.

"(*Signed*) J. P. CHERRY,
"Capt., Durham Light Infantry,
"at present attached Machine Gun Corps,
"Dibgate Camp,
"Shorncliffe."

Later on I was informed that Mr. Tyson Wilson repeated the allegations against me to another visitor, and there is no doubt from the evidence of certain witnesses that he had been seriously misled by Mrs. Beatty, and that she had convinced him that her information was true.

I wrote to Mr. Tyson Wilson on 10th May, telling him that I believed that he had acted in good faith on Mrs. Beatty's information, and that I should welcome the publication of the letters referred to by him in his question in the House of Commons on April 16th. Shortly after receiving the letter from the National Political League, I unexpectedly met Mr. Cecil Harmsworth, M.P. I had not seen him since he held the Inquiry into my case, six months previously. I showed him the letter I had received from the National Political League. He expressed his regret and indignation at the attack made on my personal character, and promised to take immediate steps to secure the publication of his Report, which I begged him to do as the Report, being entirely in my favour, would clear me effectively in the eyes of the public.

From his expressions of indignation at the injustice of the allegation, I fully believed that Mr. Harmsworth would insist on an act of common justice.

The next day, May 8th, however, Mr. Harmsworth wrote :—

> " I am not for the time being at any rate approaching **those persons mentioned in it** [the Report] **who have withheld their consent to its publication"** (*see* page 228),

and he added—

> " as to your previous record at the Welsh Commission, I had nothing but the warmest appreciation from your colleagues in that Department . . . "

and he concluded his letter—

> " I can only ask you to believe that I am deeply concerned at the wholly unmerited and gratuitous development that your case has now taken."

In reply I wrote to him as follows :—

Copy.

" Jules' Hotel,
" Jermyn Street, S.W. 1,
" 9th May, 1919.

" Dear Mr. Harmsworth,

" Thank you for your letter. The distressing part of this business is the disinclination of the authorities to act in accordance with elementary justice. The statement of Mr. Tyson Wilson to which I referred, and which has been repeated by him in various quarters, still remains unanswered, to my serious detriment.

" It is either true or untrue. If untrue, Mr. Wilson will have to stand the consequences. If true, then the Secretary of the Air Ministry made a statement which was false. This kind of thing is not done without an object. That object is the stifling of the Inquiry for which in the interests of public life in this country I have pressed for and intend to continue pressing for until I attain my object.

" In order that you may appreciate the official attitude, you will see from yesterday's Hansard that Mr. Winston Churchill when questioned on the point refused to answer, and refused to make enquiries as to the truth of Mr. Tyson Wilson's statement, and Major-General Seely, to whom I wrote on May 7th (a copy of which letter I enclose*) has not found it convenient to send a reply to the four very simple questions which I asked.

" The publication of your Report would doubtless effectively give the lie to this statement of Mr. Tyson Wilson, and if for no

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* *See* pages 224, 225.

other reason, I should hope that the Prime Minister will see fit to give his consent for this being done.

"I am,

"Yours truly,

"(*Signed*) VIOLET DOUGLAS-PENNANT."

The stories concerning my bad character, inflamed by General Seely's letter to the National Political League, and by Mr. Tyson Wilson's allegations, spread like wildfire. Members of Parliament and others were warned not to have anything to do with such a bad woman (*see* pages 233, 245). Insulting telephone messages and scurrilous anonymous letters reached me, assuring me that my dismissal had been brought about because my informant and others were determined to down me, and were prepared to bring evidence that I had been guilty of certain obscene acts, and I was warned to be "Beware" and threatened that unless I gave up pressing for an Inquiry steps would be taken to do me further harm.

Reports were spread that I had formerly been in the employment of the London County Council, and that I had been dismissed by that body for serious irregularities of conduct and administration. As I never was employed by the London County Council, but gave ten years' voluntary work, the allegation that I was dismissed is unfounded. On the contrary, that body did me the honour to co-opt me as a Member of the Education Committee, and of the Old Age Pension Committee, and I had also accepted an invitation some years ago to stand as an official candidate for election to the Council.

The rumour that I was a disreputable adventuress seems to have gained ground among those who did not know me. I received communications warning me and my friends that this was the case.

Among others personally unknown to me, Mr. Morley Roberts wrote:—

"I suppose she (Miss Douglas-Pennant) is aware that gross imputations against her were spread abroad at the time of her dismissal, and repeated in ignorance by many."

Lord Stanhope, in his speech in the House of Lords on May 27th, mentioned that attacks were being made

on my private character, and that only the day before a rumour to that effect reached him from the City (*see* page 233).

Without any inquiry, total strangers spread abroad reports that great credit was due to Mrs. Beatty, Miss Andrew, and their friends for their public-spirited action in getting rid of one who it was alleged was a source of danger to the women, more especially as they were both ardent suffragettes and must have felt deeply having to take action against a woman.

Some weeks later (August 19th, 1919), during an Inquiry held by the Air Ministry into certain alleged irregularities in connection with the W.R.A.F. clothing, to which I was subpœnaed as a witness, a further instance was shown of the grave slander spread about me. One morning when the Court had assembled, and I was waiting to be called, a temporary Officer, Major Cockburn, whom I hardly knew, but who had been attached to General Brancker's Equipment Dept., and for a short time to Colonel Bersey's staff, asked the Court's permission to make a statement. All the witnesses were on oath. He then declared that he wished to inform the Court that

"Miss Douglas-Pennant is a dishonourable woman, and that we can bring forward witnesses to prove it."

As I was at the Air Ministry Court merely in the capacity of a subpœnaed witness, and was unrepresented by Counsel, I thought it best after consulting the Secretary of the Court to ignore Major Cockburn's contemptible attack on my reputation made under the shelter of privilege. The Court listened to Major Cockburn's statement without comment.

On May 7th, 1919, I wrote to General Seely asking for details of the Inquiry referred to by Mr. Tyson Wilson, as I, the person accused, had no knowledge of it.

Copy.

" Jules' Hotel,
" Jermyn Street, S.W. 1.
" 7th May, 1919.

" Sir,

" It has recently been brought to my attention that in conversation with representatives of the National Political League,

Mr. Tyson Wilson, M.P., told them that he had been officially informed by the Secretary of the Air Ministry—

"(1) That I knew of the charges made against me,

"(2) That before my dismissal an enquiry into them was made,

"(3) That I was given a full opportunity of hearing and answering the charges, and

"(4) That I proved myself unable to make any adequate defence, and was, therefore, summarily dismissed.

"Will you be good enough to let me know whether information to the effect of any of the above statements was given to Mr. Tyson Wilson by the Secretary of the Air Ministry, or with his knowledge; or whether any information was furnished to Mr. Tyson Wilson by the Secretary of the Air Ministry from which it might have been possible for Mr. Tyson Wilson to have arrived at the above conclusion.

"I shall be much obliged to you for an early answer to this letter.

"I am

"Yours faithfully,

"(*Signed*) VIOLET DOUGLAS-PENNANT.

"Major-General J. Seely, M.P."

General Seely did not reply until May 15th, when he said that Mr. Tyson Wilson—

"says that he did not in fact make any statement as to information having been supplied to him by the Secretary of the Department."

General Seely added—

"There was, however, no Inquiry in the formal sense."

As the Chairman of the National Health Insurance Commission (Wales) (Sir Thomas Hughes), the Assistant Secretary of the War Cabinet (Mr. Thomas Jones), as well as several other reliable persons, had visited Mr. Tyson Wilson and been informed by him that the Secretary of the Air Ministry had assured him that a full Inquiry had been held before my dismissal, I told General Seely in the letter dated May 19th—

"I have no reason to believe Mr. Tyson Wilson would say other than what is true, and that there has been no misapprehension on behalf of the National Political League is evident from the fact that Mr. Tyson Wilson made very similar statements to several

other persons including myself. May I be permitted to remind you that I was not superseded, but was summarily dismissed from the Air Force."

At the time of the House of Lords Inquiry, Mr. Tyson Wilson expressed his willingness to give evidence that Mrs. Beatty both wrote to him and interviewed him at the House of Commons urging him to bring about my dismissal. Mr. Tyson Wilson saw my solicitor, who took down his statement. Mr. Tyson Wilson was in Court during the Inquiry, when Mrs. Beatty stated in her evidence that she had never seen him or written to him. He was not called, however, to give evidence that Mrs. Beatty had both written to him and visited him at the House of Commons.

During the Inquiry (October 30th, 1919) Mrs. Beatty's Counsel (Mr. Evans Jackson) asked her—

"It has been said that you made an untrue statement to Mr. Tyson Wilson—is that so?

"Mrs. Beatty: I have never until recently met Mr. Tyson Wilson. He is ready to come here and say he never saw me before the 23rd October, 1919."

This statement of Mrs. Beatty's that she had never seen Mr. Tyson Wilson before they met in the Court of Inquiry is inconsistent with Mr. Tyson Wilson's declaration to my solicitor. In spite of the fact that Mrs. Beatty said that Mr. Tyson Wilson was ready to come forward to corroborate her evidence, Mrs. Beatty's Counsel (Mr. Evans Jackson) did not call him.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: Did Mr. Tyson Wilson ever have a letter from you?

"Mrs. Beatty: As far as I know, no.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: Come Mrs. Beatty that is a thing you can be quite definite about. Did you ever write to Mr. Tyson Wilson?

"Mrs. Beatty: No, I did not."

In view of the widespread attack on my personal character, I sent a further letter to Mr. Harmsworth in the hope that he would be able to persuade those who had not dared to say to my face what they did not hesitate to say behind my back, to allow his Report to be published

as it would have cleared me immediately. It will be remembered that at the time when the Prime Minister appointed Mr. Harmsworth to hold an Inquiry, the latter informed the Press that though his investigation would be held in private the Report would be made public (*see* pages 176, 236).

Copy.

" Jules' Hotel,
" Jermyn Street, S.W. 1,
" 24th May, 1919.

" Dear Mr. Harmsworth,

" I have been hoping day by day to hear from you that it had been decided that in justice to me your Report would be published. These scurrilous charges against my character are gaining ground every day, and there is no doubt that the publication of your Report would give the lie direct to them.

" So many misleading statements have been made with regard to your Report, that it surely is time that the facts should be made clear.

" (1) General Seely, on February 12th in a personal interview, told me that he understood that your Report was not in my favour and would not do me any good.

" (2) Lord Londonderry informed the House of Lords in his speech of February 27th that he had seen you, and he gave the House the impression that you had informed him that your Inquiry had merely consisted of an interview with me, during the course of which I had hinted that I felt that I had been the victim of intrigue, and that there, so far as you were concerned, the matter ended.

" On April 16th, Mr. Churchill, in answer to questions in the House of Commons said that he was not prepared to lay your Report on the Table, as it would be 'fatal' to do so. I can only again ask you whether you consider that it is just that a perfectly innocent person should not only have their official and public career ruined, but be deprived of their personal character, in order to shield Sir Auckland Geddes, Dame Katherine Furse, Lady Rhondda, and others involved in this intrigue.

" I enclose a copy of my letter to General Seely and his reply thereto.

" Believe me,
" Yours truly,

" (*Signed*) VIOLET DOUGLAS-PENNANT."

Mr. Harmsworth's reply shows that certain people concerned in my dismissal did not wish their connection with it made public (*see* page 222) :—

"Foreign Office.

"June 2nd, 1919.

"Dear Miss Douglas-Pennant,

"I have been considering very carefully the question of the publication of my Report to the Prime Minister. **You will remember that I had previously referred this matter to some of the people mentioned in the Report, and that they had raised objections.** For the moment, I think it best not to reopen the matter.

"If the recent vote in the House of Lords and action that is proposed to be taken in the House of Commons to-day results in the setting-up of a further Inquiry, the question of publishing my Report would, I suppose, go before the new tribunal for their consideration. **At least, they would, I imagine, ask for the Report.**

"I am obliged to you for the copies of your correspondence with General Seely.

"Believe me,

"Yours truly,

"(*Signed*) CECIL HARMSWORTH."

From Mr. Harmsworth's reply, June 2nd, it will be seen that though Mr. Harmsworth was not allowed to act in accordance with elementary justice, he, at any rate, believed that in the event of a further Inquiry his Report would be asked for and considered by the Committee. In the House of Lords Inquiry, however, when my Counsel attempted to read Mr. Harmsworth's letter informing me that he was "strongly recommending that a further Inquiry should be held" the Chairman (Lord Wrenbury) intervened on the ground that it was unnecessary to go into the matter.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Parliamentary Pressure.

In view of these attacks on my personal character, it became all the more necessary to obtain an Inquiry, and my friends continued to urge for one.

To meet the pledges given by the Government in both Houses of Parliament, I had sent in four statements in succession, which, in the opinion of high legal advice, fully met the conditions laid down as to a *prima facie* case (*see* pages 201, 204). It seems inconsistent, therefore, that Mr. Churchill should not only have declined to keep his promise, but that after inviting me publicly to state my case, he should have thought fit to take serious objection to my doing so, and officially to censure me severely.

I received a letter dated May 24th, 1919, signed by an Assistant Secretary at the Air Ministry, who stated that Mr. Churchill has desired him to observe—

> "that the case constitutes no sufficient basis for a Public Inquiry."

and he adds—

> "You have not hesitated to make a series of extremely disagreeable accusations and insinuations against a number of persons whose reputation and character stands every whit as high as your own."

The Assistant Secretary further assured me on behalf of Mr. Winston Churchill that I was dismissed solely for the reason

> "that you were a very difficult person to work with in official relations, and that you were a source of friction and embarrassment to the work of the Air Ministry" (*see* pages 49, 86-87),

and he added that—

> "Mr. Winston Churchill regarded the correspondence as terminated by this letter."

As it appears from this letter, and from General Brancker's statement (*see* page 150), that my dismissal from the W.R.A.F. was due to the fact that certain people unknown to me at the Air Ministry found me

an impediment and a source of embarrassment, I may, perhaps, be permitted to mention that for sixteen years I have worked on the friendliest terms with all with whom I have come in contact, both in many Government Departments and on Public Bodies (*see* pages 301-302).

Both Mr. Winston Churchill and the Assistant Secretary (Air Ministry) who signed the above letter are quite unknown to me, as were also the Officers in General Brancker's Equipment Department, who it appeared had complained that I obstructed their work (*see* pages 129, 150).

This new reason for my dismissal is inconsistent with those put forward by Lord Weir, Lord Londonderry, Lord Peel, General Seely, as well as by Mr. Churchill himself, during the Debate on March 13th (*see* pages 194, 205-210, 250).

In the letter referred to above, Mr. Churchill informed me that he would lay the correspondence on the Table of the House, if requested by me to do so. *As it was made clear, however, that Mr. Harmsworth's Report, which was the most important part of the correspondence, would not be included, I was advised not to accept this suggestion.*

On May 29th a Debate took place in the House of Lords on a Motion put down by Lord Stanhope pressing that a Judicial Inquiry should be held forthwith—

> **"In view of the unsatisfactory and conflicting replies which had been given, and still more on account of the insinuations against Miss Douglas-Pennant's character, which are now being circulated."**

The day preceding the Debate, I received a letter from the Air Ministry, enclosing a proof of a White Paper containing certain correspondence regarding my case.

It will be remembered that Mr. Churchill had offered to publish this correspondence if requested by me to do so. I did not consent, as I was quite in the dark as to what letters he proposed to include. In this White Paper I saw *for the first time* Lady Rhondda's inaccurate

Report on the W.R.A.F., and several letters of whose existence I was also unaware. The Air Ministry had also inserted the correspondence which passed between Miss K. Andrew and Lord Weir,* including a long letter in which she made serious statements reflecting on the office organisation. Mrs. Beatty's letter of resignation, on the other hand, was omitted. It will be remembered that it contained certain trivial allegations which, if published, would have shown that she was unable to bring forward any justification for deserting her post in war time. One of the most important papers, *i.e.*, Mr. Cecil Harmsworth's Report, was also omitted, and the fact that this document, which would have completely exonerated me, has so far been withheld must strike unprejudiced people as conspicuously unfair.

The Secretary of the Air Ministry, Mr. Robinson, when enclosing the proof of this White Paper, informed me that the correspondence had been "collected for publication should occasion for publication arise." A few hours later, on the same day, May 28th, the Secretary of the Air Ministry wrote a further letter, enclosing the White Paper, and stating that by the direction of Mr. Winston Churchill "in view of the pending Debate in the House of Lords, arrangements are being made for immediate publication of the correspondence."

It will thus be seen that I was given no choice regarding the publication of this White Paper, and no time to protest against the omission of the documents referred to (*see* pages 442-443).

During the course of the Debate in the House of Lords on May 29th, Lord Ampthill, Admiral Lord Beresford, Lord Buckmaster (ex-Lord Chancellor), the Bishop of Bangor, Lord Clwyd, Lord Salisbury, and Lord Stanhope, were among those who urged that an Inquiry should be held. Lord Weir was again absent.

In his speech, Lord Stanhope pointed out that I had been entirely dependent on Colonel Bersey's Department for all necessary supplies to enable me to organise the

* I also became aware for the first time that Lord Weir, regardless of the regulations, had allowed Miss Andrew to visit him, behind my back, to complain of me.

W.R.A.F. Lord Stanhope drew attention to Colonel Bersey's rapid promotion—

> " . . . the position then was that Colonel Bersey became the channel through which Miss Douglas-Pennant was provided with pay, clothing, rations, recruits, and quarters for the women of the Royal Air Force. A few words as to Colonel Bersey . . . he was a Second-Lieutenant in the Royal Air Force, whether it was because of the dangerous nature of his work at the Air Ministry, or because of the efficient way in which he ran his Office, in which there was no Registry, no record of Camps, no nominal roll of Officers, this individual was jumped up from a Second-Lieutenant to a Lieut.-Col. in one day. The date of his promotion . . . is the 1st April last year. It soon became apparent that the decision by which the Commandant was to be directly under the Master-General of Personnel had given great offence to various Officers in the Department, and they determined to make her position impossible. It is quite obvious from the position in which Colonel Bersey was placed, that it was very easy for him to do so. Miss Douglas-Pennant had great difficulty in discovering where these Camps and Hostels were, and how many Officers there were, but eventually she did find out that the sixteen thousand women in the Royal Air Force were scattered throughout five hundred camps, and that despite their being so dispersed there were only seventy-three women Officers in the Air Force to look after the whole of them."

Lord Stanhope drew attention to the fact that I was summarily dismissed, and that in spite of the Regulations I did not receive any notice until ten days after I had been dismissed.

> **" We have here an officer dismissed from the Service, not from her appointment but from the Service, absolutely contrary to the Regulations, and not on the recommendation of any of her Senior Officers. A recommendation was made which again is not in this paper before your Lordships' House, by a Minister** [Sir Auckland Geddes] **who had nothing whatever to do with her work."**

Lord Stanhope also noted that Miss Andrew, one of the W.R.A.F. Officers, had been in correspondence with Lord Weir soon after my appointment, as to my suitability. Lord Stanhope added—

> " Miss Douglas-Pennant has been absolutely flooded with letters from both those who served with her in the Air Force, and those who did Public Service with her outside, stating how glad

they were to work with her; what a privilege it had been; and how they had enjoyed working hand in hand with her at the Air Ministry, or elsewhere . . . It was only because she was well-known to and popular with the Officers of the London County Council that they courteously placed at her disposal quarters in which she was able to train batches of two hundred Officers at a time. There is a further proof of Miss Douglas-Pennant's popularity —when the first batch of Officers who had been trained under her directions at the Air Ministry heard that she had been dismissed, they one and all stated they would go. It was only because Miss Douglas-Pennant said 'I am still Commandant of the W.R.A.F. I forbid you to resign, and if you do so I shall treat it as mutiny,' that the action which had been contemplated was prevented. It is hardly surprising, in view of the way in which Miss Douglas Pennant was treated, that **rumours are beginning to spread, making attacks against her private character.** Only yesterday a rumour to that effect reached me from the City, and I must tell your Lordships that a Mr. Tyson Wilson, who is a Whip of the Labour Party, has stated to several witnesses that **charges have been made against Miss Douglas-Pennant of so serious a character that if they were published she would never hold up her head again**; that her public career was not at all as good as was stated, and that he recommended those he was talking to not to have anything to do with her or they would also suffer. Mr. Tyson Wilson has now denied the statement, but it has been made in the presence of several witnesses, every one of whom is prepared to state that it was made (*see* pages 216-221).

"If that is to be the way in which the Public Service of this country is going to be run in future, then I feel sure your Lordships will agree that the position of any Public Servant in this country is not worth an hour's purchase. The great Public Service of this country, of which we are so justly proud, will be destroyed, and the whole situation in regard to the government of this country, will inevitably be changed . . . Grave injustice has been inflicted on Miss Douglas-Pennant. Every conceivable regulation and instruction has been over-ridden . . . If your Lordships will not insist that the Public Service should be maintained under the regulations which are in force, then as I have already stated the Public Service must inevitably be destroyed, and great damage and harm will be done to that very fine Service."

Admiral Lord Beresford drew attention to the Government's evasion, and to the secrecy which had aroused so much suspicion, and he warmly supported the demand for an Inquiry.

Lord Londonderry, Under-Secretary of State for Air, replied on behalf of the Government, saying that if an Inquiry was admitted—

> **"It is a suggestion that the Secretary of State was either moved by corrupt influences or that he was a man who by his intellectual capacity was not fitted for the position in which he was placed."**

Lord Londonderry quoted a long extract from a personal letter Lord Weir had written to Miss K. Andrew (July 19th, 1918) referring to her criticisms and interview with him (*see* pages 247, 248).

Lord Londonderry also assured the House that Mr. Harmsworth was only asked by the Prime Minister, informally, to enquire into the case. Lord Londonderry stated that he had himself interviewed Mr. Cecil Harmsworth, who had told him that there was no idea whatever that the Report was going to be made public. This statement of Lord Londonderry's is inconsistent with the assurance given by both Mr. Harmsworth and Mr. J. T. Davies (*see* pages 176, 179).

Lord Buckmaster asked "why is not Lord Weir here to answer this matter himself?" After alluding to the necessity for caution in a matter of granting Inquiries, Lord Buckmaster added—

> "It is perfectly impossible for anyone to attempt to pass any judgment whatever upon such a statement, but it is at least important to see that it is made by a person who when she was dismissed from the Air Force, as stated by Lord Weir in his letter [*see* pages 165-166] was a person in connection with whom 'There was nothing which reflected in any way on your capacity or efficiency, but you appear to be confronted with a combination of circumstances which would take too long to clear away, and the only solution, therefore, was a change.' I will comment on that later, but for the moment I want to say that this lady—so far from being of a wild hysterical character, suffering from delusions is there said to be a woman of capacity and efficiency. Therefore, my Lords, one starts with this—that here is a lady of admitted skill and character, who is not *prima facie* a person likely to be led astray, intimating wild and cruel and reckless statements about other people, and it is her firm conviction that she has evidence to show that the reason why she was dismissed from the Service, was that she was attempting to expose jobbery

and mismanagement. It is that issue which she desires to have investigated and explained.

"It is said that Lord Weir acted in a moment of great national emergency, and that you must not question too closely what he did. I agree as to that; but the point is that Lord Weir is alleged to have been induced to act in this manner by people who wanted to prevent her from pursuing her work. She claims that she was attempting to render this Government Service more clean and more efficient. When Lord Weir got rid of her, it is admitted that she was efficient and capable; but it is said that she was confronted by circumstances which would take too long to clear away. **Why did he not attempt to get rid of the circumstances? How can you possibly get over circumstances which it would take too long to clear away by getting rid of the person who knows all about them, and putting in her place, somebody who does not. There is an uncomfortable and uneasy feeling left in one's mind, that here is a grave question, which in the public interest ought to be inquired into, not only in the interests of Miss Douglas-Pennant, who is nothing but a name in this matter, but a question far bigger and graver than that namely, the question of the pure and clean administration of the Public Service. That is the matter which Miss Douglas-Pennant asks should be inquired into.**"

Lord Buckmaster then alluded to the attacks on my personal character and quoted from the letter I had received from the National Political League, in which I was challenged with regard to my alleged unsatisfactory record.

"That is where the case now stands. This lady placed her services at the disposal of the Government, and I believe there is no reason to doubt the truth of what was said by Lord Weir at the moment of her dismissal—namely, that she was efficient and zealous and capable in the work she did, and she ends by having statements made that there were charges against her which she was unable to reply to . . . I find it difficult to see why it is that after, perhaps, the only impartial enquiry made by Mr. Cecil Harmsworth, which concluded with a recommendation to the Prime Minister that this course should be taken—why it is that that course should now be denied.

"The only answer given by Lord Weir is to be found in the letter of Lord Weir to the Prime Minister on December 4th. It is an unconvincing answer, and it is impossible to overlook the fact that it is suggested that there had been friction between her and the National Service Department, who would not send her recruits, when her case is that she had not had any communication

with them at any time; and **if it had been the case, it would have been right to communicate with her before she was dismissed, and to point out the defects in her system, which were complained of, and to see if it was not possible to have them remedied.** No one desires to prejudge what the result of an Inquiry would be.

"It is possible that this lady is mistaken. Ladies have been mistaken before this; but it is possible that a Government may have done a great wrong; they have done great wrongs before this, and the question is one which in the public interest should be investigated."

The Lord Chancellor (Lord Birkenhead) on behalf of the Government while making my position as a member of the W.R.A.F. clear—to quote his words—

"She undertook obligations and she became amenable to the rules—the well-known rules of discipline in the Service"—*

endeavoured in defence of Lord Weir's action to convince the House that my request for an Inquiry was due to an attempt on my part to besmirch the reputation of every man and woman from whom I had differed, and that he could see nothing but disaster and failure if the Inquiry were granted.

The Bishop of Bangor pointed out the inconsistent statements given by the Air Ministry, and that Lord Weir had stated that he gave the order for my dismissal in September, while it was a fact, that I was dismissed by General Brancker on Lord Weir's orders in August (*see* pages 194-195).

Lord Salisbury asked why Lord Weir, the responsible man, was not present to defend the course he took.

"Lord Salisbury: That is the first reason why I feel compelled to vote for an Inquiry. The second reason is that the Private Secretary of the Prime Minister, who was directed by the Prime Minister to make an Inquiry, is not allowed apparently to have his Report presented to Parliament. Why is that? **Why should the Report be withheld from us? Why are we not to know what the Report of Mr. Cecil Harmsworth's will be?** The second is one, which, if I may say so broadly, distinguishes this case from the generality of cases to which the noble and learned Lord on the Woolsack referred. Will the noble and learned Lord

* This is exactly contrary to Lord Wrenbury's finding.

get up from the Woolsack, and say that every Brigadier-General who is superseded will have the Prime Minister's Private Secretary directed to make an Inquiry into his case ? Will he say that in every such case, the Prime Minister's Private Secretary has come to the conclusion that there ought to be a judicial inquiry, and has told the Prime Minister so. Of course that by itself, differentiates the case from all ordinary ones. These are two very strong reasons. I will give only one final reason. The noble Marquis [Lord Londonderry] speaking on behalf of the Government on the last occasion, told your Lordships, and I am sure told us in absolute good faith, that if Miss Douglas-Pennant produced a *prima facie* case for an Inquiry, the Government would be most anxious to grant it. Has she not produced a *prima facie* case ?

The House of Lords divided.

For the Inquiry Votes number 69
Against 20

Now that an Inquiry was demanded by a large majority in the House of Lords, I believed that I had nothing further to fear. I looked forward to the setting-up of an unprejudiced Court with full confidence that I should be quickly vindicated. My conscience was clear—I had plenty of reliable evidence to support my case, and I felt that my refusal to appoint unsuitable women, or to permit serious irregularities, and my determination to uphold honourable methods in the Government Service would prove to be justified.

In view of the decision in the House of Lords on 29th May, 1918, questions were asked in the House of Commons by Sir Robert Thomas, M.P. (Wrexham) and others, urging that the Government should set up a Committee of Inquiry.

Mr. Bonar Law replied on June 4th to the effect that the Government refused to grant an Inquiry.

After hearing this pronouncement, I wrote to Mr. Bonar Law as follows :—

Copy.

"Jules' Hotel,
"Jermyn Street, S.W. 1.
"12th June, 1919.

"Sir,

"In your announcement in the House of Commons on the 4th inst. of the decision of the Government to refuse an Inquiry,

you stated that the considerations which had led to that decision were :—

"(1.) That an enquiry would involve a large expenditure of public money.

"(2.) That an enquiry would be contrary to the general principles of departmental administration, and

"(3.) That it would establish a very undesirable precedent, as if the enquiry were granted it would be difficult to justify the refusal to take a similar course in the case of many others.

"May I remind you of the following facts :—

"(1.) That it is not the fact that I was "superseded," nor was I merely removed from my appointment. **I was summarily dismissed from the Air Force within ten days of the refusal of my request to be allowed to resign as a protest against the prevailing conditions;**

"(2.) That the official regulations governing the dismissal of Officers expressly provide that summary dismissal shall not be resorted to except in the case of misconduct or breach of conditions resulting in an adverse verdict of a general court-martial;

"(3.) **That in my case I was not informed of any complaint of misconduct or breach of conditions; there was no adverse report from my Senior Officer against me; there was no enquiry and no court martial, but I was dismissed at a moment's notice, and I have since gathered that my dismissal was at the instance of Sir Auckland Geddes, with whose Department I had never had any relations, and who was unknown to me, as I to him;**

"(4.) That it necessarily follows that my summary dismissal was not justified by, but was directly contrary to, the regulations of the Force which I had the honour to serve.

"If, as I gather from your observations, there are many others in a similar position to myself who have been dismissed from the Navy or Army or Air Service in defiance of the regulations under which they were serving, may I venture to suggest that the expenditure of even a considerable sum of public money would be fully justified in the interests not only of those who have been wronged, but of the general principles of departmental administration for which the Government quite properly manifest such zealous care.

"Although it is not the main reason for my continuing to press for an enquiry, it is the fact that the action of the

Government makes it impossible for me to obtain any post or take any further part in public work.

"I am,

"Yours faithfully,

"(*Signed*) V. DOUGLAS-PENNANT.

"The Right Hon.
A. Bonar Law, M.P."

Mr. Bonar Law sent a formal acknowledgment to this letter saying that he had nothing further to add to the statement he had made in the House of Commons.

For some time past a Committee composed of members of both Houses of Parliament and others had been formed in order to urge that an Inquiry should be held.

The members of this Committee had constantly assured me of their complete confidence and their determination to assist me in fighting for what we all regarded as a matter of principle and not as the negligible grievance of an individual. At the same time I was most anxious that my supporters should, as a matter of precaution, satisfy themselves personally as to the strength of the case, particularly with regard to the evidence which I was prepared to bring forward in support of it.

In response to my repeated requests numerous witnesses were interviewed and examined by a gentleman acting on behalf of the Committee, who expressed his conviction that they fully substantiated my statements.

In order further to safeguard the Committee, I requested the members to interview my Solicitor, and question him personally regarding the details of the case. My Solicitor attended two meetings of the Committee held at the House of Commons, and assured the members, to quote his words recorded in the Minutes—

"We have ample evidence on every point raised."

The following resolution was then passed by the Committee:—

"After thorough deliberation it was decided unanimously that this Committee consisting of Members of both Houses of Parliament having carefully examined the Statement

of her case by Miss Douglas-Pennant, and particulars of the Evidence which she intends to produce, considers that, as a *prima facie* case, it calls for a full Judicial Enquiry."

As a grave reflection has been cast on me owing to the fact that many of my witnesses were not called during the Inquiry, I take this opportunity of pointing out that this was not due to lack of proper precaution or to any irresponsible action on my part. On the contrary, I did everything in my power to justify the confidence placed in me by those who believed, and who I understand still believe, in the cause for which they fought (*see* page 418).

CHAPTER XXIV.

"Supersession" Subterfuge.

As the House of Lords had decided that an Inquiry should be held and the Government persisted in refusing to grant one, it was agreed that Lord Stanhope, on July 30th, 1919, should move that a Select Committee be appointed. Lord Stanhope sent the following letter to Members of the House of Lords:—

Copy.

"House of Lords,
"London, S.W. 1.
"*July 24th, 1919.*

"The Douglas-Pennant Case.

My Lord,

"On Wednesday next, July 30th, I propose to move in your Lordship's House:—

"That whereas His Majesty's Government have refused to grant a judical enquiry, this house do appoint a select Committee to examine the circumstances connected with the dismissal of Miss Violet Douglas-Pennant from the Women's Royal Air Force, and that the said Committee have power to call witnesses, to take evidence on oath, and to ask for the production of documents."

"The main facts of this remarkable case may be briefly summarised as follows:—

"(1.) The Government have consistently refused the issue, talking of supersession. When an Officer is superseded in an appointment he remains in the Service. He can only be dismissed from the *Service* by the sentence of a general court-martial or for acknowledged misconduct. Yet Miss Douglas-Pennant was dismissed from the Service although neither of these events had happened.

"(2.) An adverse report on an Officer can only be made by the immediate superior of the Officer reported on, and must be read out to the Officer and initialled by him. **Lord Weir acknowledged that no such report was ever made. Nevertheless, he ordered**

Miss Douglas-Pennant to be dismissed from the Service, one of the most severe punishments which can be inflicted on an Officer and one which is regarded as conclusive proof of disgraceful conduct.

"(3.) Lord Weir has thus set himself above the King's Regulations. Miss Douglas-Pennant, however, does not seek reparation. All that she asks is that an enquiry, conducted in public, should be held into the circumstances connected with her dismissal from the Royal Air Force. It is a request for the right of trial granted to every freeman in this country from the days of Magna Charta.

"(4.) The Government have refused to grant a judicial enquiry, either because they consider the reputation of an ex-minister is of more importance than a woman's honour, or because they are not prepared to face the revelations as to conditions in the Air Force which an enquiry may bring to light.

"Your Lordship is, therefore, urged, even at great inconvenience to yourself, to insist on the right of trial by supporting my motion in the House of Lords next Wednesday, 30th July.

"(*Signed*) STANHOPE."

During the course of the Debate on July 30th, 1918, Lord Stanhope recalled that on the last occasion, May 29th, the House of Lords had decided by more than three to one that a Judical Inquiry should be held, and that Mr. Bonar Law had announced that the Government did not intend to hold one.

In regard to Lady Rhondda's Report, Lord Stanhope said:—

"It is a remarkable document. In the first place, she makes a comparison between the Women's Royal Naval Service [W.R.N.S.] and the Women's Royal Air Force [W.R.A.F.]. **It was Lady Rhondda's duty to know, and, undoubtedly, Lord Weir also must have known, that no possible comparison could be made between these two Forces,** and for this reason. The W.R.N.S. started from small beginnings and gradually grew. It always had its proper complement of Officers, and, therefore, the organisation was comparatively easy. The W.R.A.F. started in this way—fourteen thousand women and fifty Officers were transferred from the Queen Mary's Army Auxiliary Corps [Q.M.A.A.C] and two thousand women and twenty Officers were transferred

from the W.R.N.S. When Miss Pennant was appointed, she found sixteen thousand women and only seventy Officers. I ask you how any comparison can be made between the Force which gradually grew and one which started under such conditions.

"The point which Lady Rhondda makes is this. She says there is a paucity of women Officers. Miss Pennant complained of exactly the same thing. As Lord Weir knows, it was by her personal efforts that she succeeded in obtaining accommodation from the London County Council to be able to train women Officers in batches of two hundred at a time. That was not due to other people in the Office, who apparently thought that accommodation for twenty-five Officers was sufficient. Miss Pennant realised the necessity and arranged accommodation for the two hundred (*see* pages 114-118).

"What is the third reason in Lady Rhondda's Report? The foundation of her charge is really this—that Miss Pennant refused or had failed to appoint Senior Women Officers. Those of your Lordships who have seen something of the organisation of the Army and other Military Forces in this War, will realise what a proposal that was to make. What would you do if you were appointed as a Major-General to command several thousand women, scattered over a very wide area, without a single regimental Officer or Non-commissioned Officer to assist you. What in the world would you do, and what would be the use of you if you were so appointed? The first thing, quite obviously, is to appoint women to each unit, and when you have got those women Officers appointed to each unit, then, and only then, can you appoint Senior Officers to supervise them and help them in their work. But to reverse the position is merely a question of making the job, and not helping the organisation of the Force."

Lord Stanhope challenged Lord Weir to give any sound reason for ordering my instant dismissal, and pointed out that—

> **"On August 28th, only eleven days after Miss Douglas-Pennant's resignation had been refused, Miss Douglas-Pennant was summarily dismissed. I ask Lord Weir what caused him to change his mind?**

"The reason given by Lord Weir himself, in the letter to Miss Pennant of September 6th, in which he writes:—

> 'I had definitely come to the conclusion that you would not be successful in solving the difficulties

which confronted you, and in particular, in obtaining the sympathetic co-operation of the other women's organisations.'

"The chief obstacle of the chief difficulty with which Miss Pennant had to contend in order to make satisfactory progress was the blocking of Colonel Bersey, and Lord Weir appears to agree with that, because he approved of Colonel Bersey being replaced by another Officer.

"He gave Miss Pennant exactly eleven days to get Colonel Bersey's successor instructed in his work, and to see whether she was found capable of solving these difficulties or not."

Lord Stanhope alluded to Lord Weir's allegation that I was unable to gain the co-operation of other women's organisations:—

"Did he ask Miss Pennant whether this was the case? What evidence did he take? Miss Pennant was never asked by Lord Weir, or, as far as I can find out, by anyone else, whether she got on satisfactorily with the other organisations or not.

"Let me read to your Lordships the King's Regulations for the Royal Air Force, Paragraph 133—it is laid down there that an adverse report will be made out in the first instance by the C.O. or other immediate superior of the Officer reported upon, and will be communicated to the Officer concerned, who will initial the Report at the place assigned to him for the purpose, to show that he has seen it. **Why was that policy not carried out with regard to Miss Pennant? There was no report to show and no report to initial. Then on whose report was she dismissed?** What were the reasons given for her dismissal? The reasons were given, the first by General Brancker. He told her—'You are dismissed, not because you are inefficient—you are very efficient—but because you are so grossly unpopular with all who come in contact with you, that no one can work with you.' I will have something to say with regard to the question of popularity presently."

"No Officer can be dismissed from the Army or the Air Force under any section of the Army Act, except by sentence of a general court-martial. Miss Pennant was not given a court-martial."

Lord Stanhope then pointed out that, apart from the Army Act, the Pay Warrant exists, and that, under certain sections of that Pay Warrant, Officers may be called upon

to resign, and that, under one section, and one alone, they may be summarily dismissed.

The wording of that one section, No. 525, ru follows:—

"An Officer shall be liable to be removed from our A , at any time for misconduct.

"Miss Pennant was not called upon to resign her commission. **She was dismissed, and, therefore, as the direct, and, as I submit, as the natural result of Lord Weir's action in dismissing Miss Pennant from the Air Force, a stigma attaches to her name and every sort of scandal as regards her personal character was spread.** Any Officer who is dismissed from the Service in that way is invariably turned out of any Club to which he belongs. He must have done something disgraceful. **It is quite natural that those who heard Miss Pennant had been dismissed from the Air Service should conclude that she, too, had done a disgraceful act.** She has been described as the mistress of various people, and every sort of charge of the worst description has been made against her personal character. I am quite prepared to grant that the Air Council and Lord Weir himself stated that there was no charge against Miss Pennant's personal character. **If that be the case, how was it that she was dismissed from the Army for misconduct? Quite obviously the noble Lord set aside the King's Regulations and disregarded the law.**

"Miss Pennant, although she has been injured in this way, does not demand reparation. What she asks is that an Inquiry should be made, and His Majesty's Government have refused to grant that Inquiry. May I read you a passage out of Magna Charta. It appears to meet the case.

> 'No freeman shall be taken or imprisoned or be disseized of his freehold or liberties or free customs or be outlawed or exiled or any otherwise damaged, nor will we pass upon him nor send upon him, but by lawful judgment of his Peers or by the law of the land.'

"Does any noble Lord contend that Miss Pennant has not been otherwise damaged and contrary to the law of the land.

"His Majesty's Government have refused an Inquiry. The House of Commons—the elected House—is totally uninterested in safeguarding the rights of people to a trial. It is left to the Peers of this realm to take action against oppression.

"Why does H.M. Government refuse an Inquiry? One reason put forward is the score of expense—expense from the most profligate Government this country has ever had. The

second reason is, that Miss Pennant occupies an influential position. You cannot do sixteen years in the Public Service without getting an influential position. I have here a few quotations from a very large number of letters which have been received. I am flooded with letters even here.

"I have also resolutions passed by the Court of Governors of the University College of South Wales and Monmouthshire, from the City Council of Bangor, from a meeting representing 3,000 members of the Anglesey workers, from the Bangor Trades and Labour Council, from the Holyhead Trades and Labour Council, and from the Association of Women Clerks and Secretaries, and from the North Wales Quarrymen's Union:

'From our knowledge of Miss Pennant, and our experience of her work as Insurance Commissioner, we can assure you that all Societies in North Wales have the highest regard for her administrative capacity, fair dealing, and her efficiency as a Public Official.'

"That is the sort of influence Miss Douglas-Pennant exercises, and that is put forward as a reason why she should not have an Inquiry."

Lord Weir, who was present in the House of Lords for the first time since his elevation to the Peerage, then spoke. His explanation for his action in dismissing me was that the resignation of Miss Pratt, Mrs. Beatty, and Miss K. Andrew, had weakened his confidence in me. He then informed the House that he had seen Miss Andrew personally, and that "her criticism of the organisation caused 'him' to have some misgiving." Lord Weir did not explain to the House that Miss Andrew, who decided that I was unsuitable, was a young Officer whom he had permitted to enter into correspondence with him, and to visit him, a short time after my appointment, without the knowledge of General Paine or myself.

It is difficult to understand how Lord Weir could have allowed such a grave breach of discipline. In the ordinary course of procedure in the Service, Miss K. Andrew's status and previous record would not be regarded as entitling her to advise the Secretary of State, as to the administrative capabilities and personal qualifications of her Commandant. Doubtless many of the members present in the House of Lords would have been surprised if they had realised that the Miss Andrew, whose opinion as an

authority was quoted so impressively by Lord Weir and Lord Londonderry, was an inexperienced girl who, a few months previously, was employed as a clerk by a firm of toymakers in a provincial town (*see* page 83).

I have already pointed out that I was quite unaware of Miss Andrew's action at the time, and treated her up to the moment that she left with every consideration. It will be remembered that it was at my suggestion that her resignation was refused when Miss Pratt and Mrs. Beatty resigned, as I believed that Miss Andrew's youth and inexperience had caused her to be unduly influenced by them (*see* page 82).

It appeared from her letter of resignation, addressed to Lord Weir (1st July, 1918), handed in only a fortnight after I accepted the post of Commandant, that Miss Andrew had taken exception to the fact that she had not been put in charge of recruiting for the W.R.A.F.

It will be remembered (*see* pages 110-111) that Colonel Bersey was responsible for recruiting in conjunction with the Labour Ministry's representative (Lt.-Col. Williams) whose appointment coincided with the time of Miss Andrew's letter of complaint to Lord Weir.

I was convinced that Miss Andrew's inexperience and the lack of discrimination which led her to select unsuitable women for the posts of Officers (*see* pages 83-84) would not have justified my recommending her for such a responsible post.

Several letters passed between Miss Andrew and Lord Weir—from her letter of 10th July, Miss Andrew appears to have resented the fact that her resignation had not been accepted, as she tells Lord Weir:—

> "I cannot understand the preferential treatment received by me at this time. . . . Also that my resignation has not been placed before the Air Council."

The following is an extract from a reply signed "Yours very truly, Weir," dated July 19th, 1918:—

> "Dear Miss Andrew,
>
> "Following on my recent conversation with you, I have, as promised, made enquiry on the points which you raised, and I have given the whole subject further consideration."

The following extract from Miss Andrew's reply to Lord Weir on July 23rd, throws a curious light on her conception of duty and discipline when receiving orders :—

> "I have accepted the suggestion of yourself and the Master-General of Personnel that I should remain on duty for the present."

During the course of his speech, Lord Weir informed the House of Lords that Colonel Bersey's supersession had increased his misgivings, and that General Paine had told him that things were not going well, and Lord Weir added that he was "conscious of a feeling of distinct uneasiness. . . . . My faith in her [Miss Douglas-Pennant] was shaken." I need hardly again point out that General Paine has persistently and consistently denied ever having felt or expressed any misgivings as to my work and capabilities, but that he did inform Lord Weir that he was dissatisfied with M.3 Department is borne out by the fact that ten days before my dismissal Lord Weir concurred in General Paine's decision to supersede Colonel Bersey, and at the same time to refuse to allow me to resign (*see* pages 134, 267-272).

It has yet to be explained how with any justice Lord Weir could feel it necessary in the public interest to punish me for the alleged deficiencies of Colonel Bersey's Department, especially when it is remembered that Colonel Bersey and General Guy Livingston had been in charge of the W.R.A.F. before my appointment.

In his speech Lord Weir made the significant admission—

> "An Inquiry might establish the existence in the Department of a great deal of petty intrigue, but I utterly fail to understand how such a finding could do more than disclose the admitted difficulties with which Miss Douglas-Pennant had to contend in her Department."

It is inconceivable that at a time of grave national peril the strenuous and whole-hearted efforts of those serving under General Paine to meet the man-power shortage and put the W.R.A.F. on to a sound footing should have met with so much opposition. It is difficult to understand how Lord Weir could reasonably expect the Women's Royal Air Force to succeed when the

Commandant was not provided with the necessary accommodation for housing the rank and file under suitable conditions, or adequate premises to enable her to train the officers so urgently needed to ensure the welfare of the women. No reason has yet been given as to why the uniforms indispensable to the maintenance of discipline, and as an incentive to recruiting, were not forthcoming during the whole of the period that I was Commandant. Further, why the bonus promised to the women on enrolment was not paid when it was plain that the non-fulfilment of the Air Ministry's pledges was causing a feeling of grave unrest among the rank and file, resulting in serious strikes. The women in certain Camps, who did not know me, cannot be blamed for believing the report widely circulated, that the Commandant was not only a woman of bad character, unfit to command them, but was withholding their pay and refusing them the uniforms to which they were entitled. The minor hindrances, such as the objections to my obtaining the services of a Clerk, adequate Office equipment, and means of personal transport, also call for explanation. I heard after my dismissal that it had been common talk among Officers in the W.R.N.S. and the Q.M.A.A.C. that the W.R.A.F. was not going to be allowed to succeed, as it would not be given the administrative machinery required to enable it to be carried on, and that it was to be broken up and the respective Units handed back to the Navy and Army. It is difficult to understand why it was laid down that the Commandant must depend entirely for supplies on the goodwill of an intermediary Department (*i.e.*, M.3.), which had the power to withhold all that was necessary. It will be remembered that in the case of the other Corps, no such third party intervened. It was not until General Brancker took over General Paine's post that M.3. was abolished. My successor from the War Office was then given a free hand, and provided with the Office equipment, training, and other accommodation, uniforms, and means of personal transport indispensable to the success of her work.

It has been repeatedly put forward on behalf of the Air Ministry that my successor did not meet with any of

the difficulties which confronted me. It is possible that thoughtful people will realise that in view of the chaos which existed when I became Commandant, and which was admitted by the Air Ministry (*see* page 261), it would hardly have been possible for my successor, notwithstanding her ability, to have attained immediately such a high standard of efficiency unless she had found the policy established and the office organisation in running order.

Later on in his speech, Lord Weir referred to Mr. Harmsworth's Inquiry, and threw a curious and interesting sidelight on the pressure he brought to bear to persuade the Prime Minister to withdraw his promise that a further Inquiry should be held. Lord Weir informed the House that he told the Prime Minister that:—

> "**The view of an Inquiry which I expressed to the Prime Minister and Mr. Harmsworth was that it would only last ten minutes, and that I [Lord Weir] would be the only witness.** As neither the Prime Minister, nor Mr. Harmsworth, nor myself, could satisfy himself the matter was left with the Prime Minister to settle after he had received a letter which I promised to send him, and which is contained in the first Paper, dated December 4th." [*See* page 183].

Lord Peel, Under-Secretary of State for War, gave on behalf of Mr. Winston Churchill, an entirely new explanation of the mystery surrounding this affair. He emphasised the fact that there was no suggestion that my removal from the W.R.A.F. was due to any lack of ability, or that there were any charges against my personal character. Lord Peel then informed the House that Lord Weir's misgivings had been aroused as I, he alleged—

> "Had objected to five ladies as holding too high positions, who were placed in less well-paid and inferior positions. We have heard of the case of the other three ladies who were actually dismissed from their posts on the representation of Miss Douglas-Pennant. What she recommended was accepted. All through the first month of her occupation of the post; therefore it is quite clear that she was fully supported by her chief."

With regard to Lord Peel's statement I can only repeat that there is no truth in it whatever. I never

personally dismissed anyone from the W.R.A.F. excepting two women who had been arrested by the Police and reported to me for soliciting at Victoria Station (*see* page 85).

It is well-known that the three W.R.A.F. Officers, who, Lord Peel assured the House of Lords "were actually dismissed from their posts on the representations of Miss Douglas-Pennant" had, on the contrary, suddenly resigned, two at least, after interviews with Dame Katherine Furse, without any previous indication that they had the slightest dissatisfaction with their work, or grievance against me. Far from recommending their dismissal, I urged these Officers to withdraw their resignations, and I suggested to Lord Weir and General Paine that they should refuse to accept them, which suggestion was adopted in the case of Miss Andrew (*see* page 57).

It is conceivable that Lord Peel may have been verbally misinformed by the Air Ministry's Secretariat as to the true facts of these three resignations. It is difficult, however, to account in the same way for his further statement, to the effect that I had removed five ladies from "high positions to less well-paid and inferior positions." While making this statement Lord Peel held in his hand a copy of the Supplementary White Paper, Cmd. 254, issued by the Air Ministry. Even a cursory glance would have shown him that this White Paper contained copies of a number of letters from the five ladies in question, from which Lord Peel would have seen that, on the contrary, they deeply resented the fact that I had felt unable to recommend them for certain high and very responsible posts (Area Inspectors and Superintendent of Area Inspectors), which appointments had been promised them before I became Commandant and before they had been through their training.

Lord Weir was present in the House of Lords when Lord Peel brought this unfounded accusation against me. Lord Weir, however, made no attempt to correct it, though he had himself refused to make these appointments and decided that the resignations should be accepted.

Lord Peel, in conclusion, assured the members of the House of Lords that I never was dismissed—to quote his words :—

> "The simple fact is that a particular official has been removed from the post which she occupied. I submit that this is not a case of injustice to an individual. It is the case of the supersession of an individual by another competent official. **I submit further that my noble friend, Lord Weir, through the whole of this matter, has done his best, as others have done their best, to shield the dignity of this lady and to make that passage and that transference as easy as it is possible to make it.**
>
> **"The utmost trouble was taken all through by my noble friend to preserve the dignity of this lady and to do as little as possible to interfere in any way with her future career."**

Those who heard and those who read Lord Peel's assurance will feel inclined to accuse him of being a humorist. That without any warning instant dismissal should follow immediately after my resignation had been refused on the ground that my work gave every satisfaction, with abrupt orders to leave the Office instantly before even a successor to the post had been appointed, should be the best results obtainable by the united efforts of Lord Weir, Major-General Brancker, Major Baird, and the Air Ministry Secretariat "to make that passage as easy as possible" does not appear to reflect great credit on their diplomacy or administrative ingenuity. General Seely's letter to the National Political League informing the President that Lord Weir had personally investigated the case and decided "that in the best interests of the W.R.A.F. it was necessary that Miss Douglas-Pennant's connection with that Force should cease" hardly bears out Lord Peel's assurance that "the utmost trouble was taken to do as little as possible to interfere in any way with her future career."

The transition stages are admittedly awkward ones—the moment selected by Lord Weir was my return from a Depot in the country, under the control of the Equipment Department, where a serious and dangerous Strike had broken out among 1,800 women owing to breach of contract on the part of the Air Ministry. I returned from settling the Strike and the following day I was dismissed. Short

of shooting me on sight it is difficult to see how Major-General Brancker could have effected my "passage and transference" in a more rapid and volcanic manner (*see* pages 150-151, 385).

It is possible that others may agree with Lord Ampthill's view of the case. During the debate on July 30th, he denied Lord Peel's statement that a dangerous precedent would be set if an Inquiry were granted :—

> "Let us dispose of that idea at once. **You cannot set up a precedent by instituting this Inquiry, because there is no similar case. We have that fully admitted. Nobody in His Majesty's Forces has been dismissed without trial or inquiry, therefore there is no other case for which a similar inquiry could be demanded. It cannot be too often repeated . . . . that we are not out to obtain personal reparation for Miss Douglas-Pennant. That is not our object and that is not her object. Our object is to call attention to the violation of a fundamental principle of all our liberties.** My noble friend, Lord Stanhope, appealed to Magna Charta . . . . My noble friend was absolutely justified in pointing out that **the very bedrock of our liberties is that no freeborn citizen of this country may be punished unless he has been tried and condemned. What has happened in this case is that an Officer has been arbitrarily dismissed without trial and without condemnation.** It is deplorable to see how not only Lord Weir, but also the noble Viscount who speaks for the Government, keep on reiterating the word 'Supersession.' The use of that word is false. It is not honest. Miss Pennant was dismissed, and dismissed in a manner in which none of your Lordships would dismiss a scullerymaid, or any other servant, or dependent you may have. This is not supersession.
>
> "Lord Weir, not content with the word supersession, tried to lead you on to another track by saying that Miss Pennant was really transferred to another Department. I can only appeal to your Lordships' commonsense. If you are going to transfer an official to another Department, you do not do it in quite the way in which it was done in the case of Miss Douglas-Pennant. There is no excuse whatever, not even the pressure of wartime and the emergencies of a critical situation which can justify the dismissal of anybody in the particular manner in which this lady was dismissed.
>
> ". . . . What we want to inquire into is, namely, the circumstances connected with the dismissal of Miss Violet Douglas-Pennant—not whether she was justly or unjustly

dismissed, but the circumstances in which this arbitrary dismissal took place. **The dismissal was an altogether unprecedented act, and an act of so unusual, so arbitrary a nature, that it can only have been conceived in a very unwholesome atmosphere. It was this incident of Miss Pennant's dismissal which gave rise to very strong suspicion that everything was not going on well at the Air Ministry.** It is idle to pretend that an act of that kind was merely an error of judgment on the part of the Minister. The principle that nobody may be punished unless first tried and condemned is known to every man, woman, and child in this country. Any child could have set Lord Weir right on that point. What we want to know, therefore, is what motives were at work. For motives and strong motives there must have been, which actuated Lord Weir to risk taking such very unusual action. What were the circumstances existing at the Air Ministry in which those motives were begotten. That is what we want to know. . . . . If everything had been straight and above board, and simple and innocent as you might have been led to believe by the speech to which we listened, then what, in Heaven's name, has there been all this secrecy, mystery, evasion, and equivocation about all this time."

The House then divided, and Lord Stanhope's Motion that a Select Committee be appointed was carried by **69** votes against **42.**

I have endeavoured unceasingly in my attempt to obtain an Inquiry to emphasise the point that the case has no public interest or value on the personal side, but that as a "test case" it has an important and far-reaching bearing on the administration of the Public Service. One of its most serious features has been the revelation that, in order to conceal a grave scandal, men of undisputed integrity and honour in private life have allowed themselves in their official capacity to be the mouthpiece of statements which had not the remotest foundation in fact.

Lord Weir has so far allowed General Seely's most misleading letter to the President of the National Political League to remain uncorrected, though it conveys to the public a serious and, I submit, wholly undeserved impression of my work and fitness for responsibility.

During the House of Lords Inquiry, Lord Weir accounted for what he declared was "not exactly a truthful answer" given by Major Baird in the House of Commons on August 7th, 1918, by the excuse that it was a "*Parliamentary answer.*"

In these days when perjury in the Law Courts appears to be an infectious disease, it is surely all the more necessary to expect that responsible Ministers of the Crown, at any rate, should have sufficient tact and discretion to handle even difficult situations without the sacrifice of truth.

It has been difficult to keep pace with the inventive ingenuity displayed by the Air Ministry's Secretariat to provide the Ministers with adequate cover calculated to shield them from public censure and criticism.

Amid the tangle of subterfuge and misrepresentation, in which the Air Ministry has involved itself in the endeavour to justify the action of Lord Weir and Sir Auckland Geddes, the amazing allegations and misstatements of Lord Peel and Mr. Winston Churchill are, perhaps, the most glaring instances of the sacrifice of truth on the altar of political expediency. As to whether the desire to screen certain high officials, themselves servants of the public, justified the War Office and Air Ministry in discrediting the reputation and wrecking the future of another public servant, by unfounded statements, must be left to the fair-minded and unprejudiced public to decide.

Part IV.—House of Lords Inquiry.

CHAPTER XXV.

The Opening Stage.

As soon as the House of Lords decided to hold an Inquiry, Lord Curzon, on behalf of the Government, approached Lord Stanhope and told him that the Government wished to be represented on the Select Committee, and that, if this were agreed, the Lord Chancellor would then appoint a Judge to preside. Lord Stanhope consented. Lord Curzon then stipulated that no Peer who had voted for the Inquiry should be appointed as a Member of the Committee. This greatly limited the choice, especially as it was stated that Lord Curzon further demurred at several names suggested —among others, to Lord Askwith, whose wide experience and knowledge of departmental matters would have been of great value. It appeared that Lord Curzon also objected to the suggestion that Lord Dynevor, whom I did not know, should be invited to serve, on the ground that as he came from Wales, where I had been one of the Insurance Commissioners for some years, he (Lord Dynevor) might be prejudiced in my favour, as I "was known," Lord Curzon alleged, "to be popular there." Lord Curzon cannot have recollected that the only reason given me for my dismissal by General Brancker was—to quote his words—"gross unpopularity with everyone who has ever seen you." On the other hand, we raised no objection to the nomination of Lord Kintore, the father-in-law of the Parliamentary Secretary of the Air Ministry, Major Baird, into whose administration the Inquiry was to be held (*see* pages 368-372, 376).

Finally a Committee was appointed, consisting of: Lord Wrenbury (Chairman), Earl of Kintore, Earl of Denbigh, Field-Marshal Lord Methuen, and Lord Farrer.

The first meeting took place on August 15th, 1919. As I was informed that it was a purely formal one for the legal representatives only, I did not attend it. The Chairman, Lord Wrenbury, decided that the statements of case of each person concerned must be lodged not later than October 7th, 1919.

In reply to my Counsel's inquiry, Lord Wrenbury laid down the lines on which the Inquiry was to be conducted :—

> "Lord Wrenbury : I think it is very like the procedure in an action. The analogy which occurs to one is that it is something like an action brought by Miss Violet Douglas-Pennant for wrongful dismissal—not in the legal sense perhaps, but in the ordinary sense, and it will be for her to begin and make out her case. She will call her evidence."

The Committee then adjourned until October 14th, 1919.

I submit that the analogy which occurred to Lord Wrenbury's mind was like most analogies—entirely misleading. The terms of the motion were that :—

> "This House do appoint a Select Committee **to examine the circumstances connected with the dismissal** of Miss Violet Douglas-Pennant from the Women's Royal Air Force, and **that the said Committee have power to call witnesses** . . . . . .

The result was that I found myself at the outset heavily handicapped by Lord Wrenbury's decision in that I was expected to prove wrongful dismissal. Owing to the varied and inconsistent reasons given me by the Air Ministry, I had no idea why I was dismissed beyond the fact that certain people—I was not allowed to know who—had refused to co-operate with me, and General Brancker alleged that I was "grossly unpopular"

Shortly before the Inquiry opened, I heard through my Solicitor that Sir Edward Carson, who had undertaken my case, feared that owing to the railway strike and the serious condition of affairs in Ireland, it might not be possible for him to arrive in time from Belfast to open the case, and he suggested my considering the advisability of securing another Counsel, whom I could rely on to be present. In view of the short time available, I was advised by my Solicitor to put the case into the hands

of Mr. Hawke, K.C. A great deal has been said by my opponents, and much capital made out of the fact that Sir Edward Carson did not appear for me. It has been repeatedly stated that he threw me over, alleging that I had no case. I feel confident that if Sir Edward Carson had formed this opinion, he would have told me so at the outset, and not allowed me to rely on him up to the last moment. I can only accept what he gave as his true reason.

In the Interim before the opening of the Inquiry I continued to receive warnings and anonymous communications—that I was not to be allowed to emerge successfully, etc., etc.—but to all this kind of thing I naturally turned a deaf ear.

In this and the following chapters I have endeavoured to give as full an account of the Inquiry as is possible in the necessarily limited space. For the sake of brevity I have summarised most of the evidence, except when, owing to its great significance, I have felt obliged to give lengthy extracts from the official and verbatim report.

Among the matters dealt with in the earlier stages are:—

(*a*) Lack of accommodation and equipment;
(*b*) Delay in providing uniforms;
(*c*) Failure to issue the W.R.A.F. revised Regulations;
(*d*) The finding of the Court on these points.

Then come the allegations brought against me by Mrs. Beatty, Miss K. Andrew, Miss Pratt, Dame K. Furse, and others; the question of "intrigue"; the evidence of Lord Weir, Lady Rhondda, Sir Auckland Geddes, and Major Baird (Sir John Baird); the conditions at Hurst Park Motor Transport Depot, and the finding of the Court thereon; and, finally, a general summary of the whole case.

The Committee of Inquiry met on October 14th in a Committee Room at the House of Commons, and my case opened the proceedings.

The opposing Counsel numbered twelve, and included on behalf of the Air Ministry, Sir Gordon Hewart (Attorney-General), Mr. Rigby Swift (now Mr. Justice

Swift), and Mr. Branson (now Mr. Justice Branson), while I was represented by Mr. J. A. Hawke, K.C., Mr. Stuart Bevan, K.C., and Mr. J. N. Buchanan.

Knowing that I should shortly be called upon to give evidence, and having no experience whatever of legal formalities, I asked my Solicitor to explain the procedure, and to advise me as to the right and proper way in which I should present my case to the Court. No fitting opportunity presented itself, and after the Inquiry had opened, to my dismay, he informed me that legal etiquette debarred him from giving me any advice or from holding any communication with me on the subject until I had been examined, cross-examined, and re-examined. I had not received any previous warning that this restriction would be imposed and I was thus unexpectedly deprived of any legal advice at the most critical moment.

On the second day of the Inquiry I went into the witness box, and was examined and cross-examined for five days. Unfortunately, I had influenza, and with a high temperature and bad throat it was not easy to think clearly or speak coherently.

On the third day of the case I had pleurisy, and though obliged to be present, I was so ill and in such great pain during the whole of the eighteen days of the Inquiry, that it became still more difficult to follow all the different stages closely.

Not having the advantage of my Solicitor's advice, I went into the witness box quite ignorant of legal procedure or of the rules of evidence. I took for granted that it was my duty to answer fearlessly every question put to me, according to my honest belief. Thus, when I was required to express my views on certain persons or events, I gave my candid opinion, stating exactly the impression I had formed.

My idea of justice had, I fear, been largely formed by the statue of Justice—blind Justice—holding the scales evenly balanced.

I was under the impression that the Committee of Inquiry would not merely confine its duties to listening to evidence; but would probe and search out the truth, and

insist on the production of all available evidence, regardless of the wishes of the opposing parties. I did not realise that my previous record would not be allowed to count, and that I should be held to be guilty of any accusations, however preposterous and incredible, which my opponents brought forward unless I could produce witnesses to disprove them.

As I had been at the outset almost invariably alone in the W.R.A.F. Office with my accusers, it was difficult to refute their allegations on certain points.

As soon as the case opened, it was evident that I was placed in the position of a guilty person who had to prove innocence.

In the Air Ministry's "Statement of Case," extracts from which follow immediately, it was alleged for the first time that Lord Weir had ordered my removal on the ground that I was incompetent and lacking in tact. The Air Ministry admitted that in arriving at this opinion, Lord Weir was influenced by Sir Auckland Geddes, Lady Rhondda, and Miss K. Andrew, and it is clear from the evidence that my Senior Officer (General Paine) and others who knew the true facts were never consulted. I have already pointed out that Sir Auckland Geddes (whom I had never seen) had been guided by Lady Rhondda (whom I hardly knew), and that Lady Rhondda had obtained her information as to my alleged unsuitability—not from the distinguished Officer under whom I had served—Major-General Sir Godfrey Paine (Master General of Personnel) but from sources which one would have supposed she might at once have recognised as tainted by the disappointment of the ladies on whom she relied. It will be remembered that at the same time Mrs. Beatty had approached Mr. Tyson Wilson, who in view of the seriousness of her information felt obliged to interview the Secretary of the Air Ministry, and insist on my dismissal (*see* pages 216, 364, 365).

> " It is admitted that Miss Douglas-Pennant was removed from the post of Commandant because she failed to exhibit the organising and administrative ability necessary to make her tenure of it successful, and the tact which was essential to enable her to

co-operate successfully with her colleagues and subordinates, with the Ministry of National Service, and with the heads of the other Women's Corps, whose co-operation was necessary.

"It is admitted that the then Secretary of State for the Royal Air Force ordered the removal of Miss Douglas-Pennant from the post of Commandant.

"It is admitted that in coming to this decision the then Secretary of State was influenced among other matters, by the opinions expressed by Sir Auckland Geddes, as Minister of National Service, Lady Rhondda, as head of the Women's Branch of the Ministry of National Service, and Miss Andrew.

"It is not admitted that such influence was in any way improper or improperly used.

"It is not admitted that the then Secretary of State was influenced by Dame K. Furse.

"It was to remedy the state of affairs admittedly and necessarily existing in a new organisation that Miss Douglas-Pennant was appointed Commandant, and it was because she proved unable to do so that she was removed.

"Miss Douglas-Pennant was removed from the position of Commandant of the Women's Royal Air Force because in the opinion of H.M. Secretary of State for the Royal Air Force, she was, for the reasons stated above, incompetent to discharge the duties of the office, and for no other reason."

The above allegation of incompetency is in direct conflict with Lord Weir's previous statements, and with the repeated assurances of several Ministers that my removal from the post of Commandant was in no way due to lack of efficiency or administrative ability.

The Counsel for the Air Ministry, however, were confronted with the fact that if they failed to substantiate the charge of "gross unpopularity," they would be left without a shadow of reason to justify Lord Weir's sudden determination to order my instant removal from the W.R.A.F. ten days after he had agreed with General Paine that my resignation must be refused, as my work gave every satisfaction. It is a significant fact that even in his speech and summary of the Case, the leading Counsel for the Air Ministry (Mr. Rigby Swift) avoided all mention of this point and did not attempt to explain it. On the other hand, he gave a vivid account of my alleged incompetence and violent behaviour during the time I was

Commandant. In an eloquent speech, he declared that I had neglected my work, and he endeavoured to show that I was responsible for the failure to provide accommodation, equipment, and uniforms. As there seemed to be some difficulty in proving that I was a virago, owing to the overwhelming evidence in my favour, the Counsel for the Air Ministry was driven as a last resource to bring forward a totally new and startling allegation, not mentioned in its Statement of Case, that certain of my allegations were due to "*hallucination run mad*," and that Lord Weir had no choice but to remove someone so utterly unfit to be in control of the W.R.A.F. The Air Ministry, however, did not venture to produce witnesses on a point which would have been refuted immediately by medical evidence.

After many years of happy though arduous work, it was a strange experience to hear oneself described during the Inquiry, by the Attorney-General (Sir Gordon Hewart) as :—

> "one who came into the Force saturated with suspicion against those who were her equals in rank in the Force—those who were her superiors, and those who were her subordinates, and **it was quite obvious that she was unfit to be left in control of the Women's Royal Air Force.**"

If this had been a true statement, or even if it had had the slightest foundation in fact, there is no doubt that the action of Sir Auckland Geddes and Lord Weir would have been amply justified. It would be difficult to imagine anything more detrimental to the discipline and *morale* of a Corps, or to the promotion of a spirit of respect and loyalty, than the breeding of a feeling of suspicion and distrust by the Commandant. I emphatically deny that I came into the W.R.A.F. with anything but the whole-hearted wish and determination to do everything in my power to assist in every possible way the gallant men of the Air Force, and at the same time to ensure the welfare and efficiency of the fine body of women under my command.

There is no possible justification for the statement that I "came into the Force saturated with suspicion."

After the disloyal officers had left, the happiest relations existed between me and my staff. It was only when I found myself suddenly dismissed and discredited, and treated as someone who had forfeited all claim to respect, that I realised what had been going on behind my back outside the Corps, and that the warnings I had received—that the W.R.A.F. was not to be allowed to succeed—were indeed well-founded, though at the time I had treated them as negligible and unworthy of notice.

Lack of Accommodation and Equipment.

One of the first matters brought before their Lordships was the delay in providing accommodation and equipment, which, I alleged had obstructed my work, and prevented my immediately appointing sufficient officers to supervise and control all the women. Lord Wrenbury, during the course of the Inquiry and in his report, repeatedly emphasised the point that the disorganisation in the W.R.A.F. when I took over was not disputed. To quote from the report "for the very reason that this state of things existed, Miss Douglas Pennant was appointed. Her task was to get things in order."

I submit that with the best will in the world, and in spite of working from the early hours of the morning each day, until the early hours of the following morning, week in, week out, it was impossible to do more than I accomplished during the ten weeks I was Commandant.

It must not be forgotten that everything necessary to the existence of the Corps—accommodation, equipment, uniforms, and the promised bonus — was delayed until General Brancker succeeded General Paine as Master-General of Personnel. Lord Weir and Major Baird, the Parliamentary Secretary, were informed of these difficulties in the interview with General Paine and myself on July 23rd, 1918, to which I have already referred (*see* pages 114-115) We discussed the matter at length, and I told Lord Weir that I could not take the responsibility of receiving large numbers of women recruits in remote Air Force camps, unless I was allowed sufficient and suitable accommodation for

housing them. It will be remembered that at the same interview, I assured Lord Weir that if he would give me adequate premises in which to train a sufficient number of W.R.A.F. officers, I should very quickly get the discipline of the Force on to right lines. I made clear that though I had full confidence in the W.R.A.F. if under proper control, it was impossible to expect any sort of discipline if the policy were continued of turning hundreds of young women to work in the men's camps and quarters without any sort of supervision and without uniforms to facilitate their identification at night.

Mr. Winston Churchill's statement in the House of Commons on March 13th, 1919—that I had made constant complaints to Lord Weir, until he decided that he could support me no longer—*is utterly untrue.* I never made any complaints. I merely made the request just stated, as I believed it to be not only in the interest of the women, but for the credit and good name of the Royal Air Force itself. At the time, Lord Weir appeared to be in complete agreement, and expressed his satisfaction with the work I had accomplished, and the policy I was pursuing.

I protest that my request was a perfectly reasonable one, and that no responsible officer in charge of 16,000 women working in over 500 scattered Air Force camps, and who was expecting shortly to have to take over another 70,000 recruits, could have done otherwise than make it. When General Paine pointed out how seriously the recruiting of the rank and file and the training of W.R.A.F. officers was held up owing to lack of accommodation, Lord Weir himself gave instructions that the recruiting campaign should be postponed until October 1st, 1918, in order that the Equipment Department might arrange for the necessary accommodation and furniture by that date.

So far as my Department was concerned the training schemes and arrangements for taking over the recruits were ready. I only lacked accommodation and equipment, and as the situation was extremely serious, I made every effort in my power to meet it. By making use of all my

private and personal resources, I had succeeded, with General Paine's approval, in obtaining the loan of temporary accommodation for the training of officers, and was thus able to turn out several hundred promising and reliable women to supervise the W.R.A.F. employed in the Air Force camps (*see* pages 102-104). It was inevitable, however, that in such a vast organisation, which was increasing every day, the stage was soon reached when my private resources were exhausted. As the Equipment Department and the Air Ministry's Secretariat continued to withhold the necessary facilities, I found myself confronted with the prospect of the influx of thousands of recruits, without any adequate preparation being made by the Departments responsible for their accommodation.

I have already pointed out (*see* pages 16-18) that ***the necessary accommodation was obtainable when I prepared the training scheme on May 30th, a fortnight after I arrived at the Air Ministry.***

The following Minute from General Paine to Brigadier-General Livingston shows that General Paine at once approved this scheme when I submitted it to him on June 1st, 1918, and that he gave orders to Brigadier-General Livingston to ask the Equipment Department to take immediate action to secure the premises :—

"Deputy Master-General of Personnel [Brigd.-General Livingston]

"Approved [*i.e.* the Training Scheme]. Will D.A.Q.S. [*i.e.*, Brigd.-General Fletcher—General Brancker's Deputy] take immediate action as this is a very urgent matter, and appears to me much better than the scheme proposed for Halton Camp: [*i.e.*, the insanitary huts suggested by the Equipment Dept., *see* pages 15, 16.]

"(*Signed*) G.P."

[*i.e.*, Major-General Sir Godfrey Paine].

"1.6.18."

That no adequate steps, however, were taken to provide this accommodation or equipment, and that the matter was held up by the Air Ministry's Secretariat and the Equipment Department for nearly three months, until August 21st, 1918, a few days before my dismissal, is

shown by the following Minutes which passed between General Paine and the Secretary of the Air Ministry, Mr. (now Sir) A. Robinson.

"A.F.S. [Air Force Secretary].

"This matter has been under consideration for two months. Meanwhile the W.R.A.F. are not able to get on with the recruitment and training required, with the result that a large number of men cannot be released for more important work. I have been most carefully into all the circumstances and am convinced that no more suitable accommodation can be found. I approve of this scheme and request financial authority may be given forthwith.

"(*Signed*) G.P.

"M.G.P. [Master-General of Personnel],

"I concur.

"(*Signed*) W.A.R.

"12.8.18."

If I had been allowed these vital necessaries to enable me to carry out my instructions, there is no doubt that I should have got the Corps on to a sound footing in a few weeks. As soon as Miss Pratt, Mrs. Beatty, Miss Andrew, and their friends had left, I had the loyal co-operation, not only of my Staff at H.Q. but of the officers as a whole. The rank and file excelled in their ambition to show their patriotism and to uphold the credit of the W.R.A.F. *Officers were available, recruits were available, accommodation and equipment were also available—though not forthcoming.* Those Air Force officers who had the welfare of the W.R.A.F. at heart, and who did not resent the necessity for temporarily replacing men by women, gave me whole-hearted co-operation and all the help in their power.

In spite of this satisfactory and encouraging position, after six weeks hard work, the fact remains that everything necessary for carrying on the W.R.A.F. was withheld. Vast sums of public money were wasted, and at the most acute moment of our national peril, when the man-power question was at a highly critical stage, the replacement of 70,000 men by women was prevented.

The following extract from a Minute from Colonel Bersey to General Paine shows that this policy had the disastrous result that instead of the W.R.A.F.

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Group of W.R.A.F. Rank and File at Avery Hill, August, 1918

Presented to Miss V. Douglas-Pennant *by the W.R.A.F. Staff*

releasing men for other war service, male personnel were actually being drafted in to do women's work.

"6th August, 1918.

"M.G.P. [General Paine].

"The necessity for easing up recruitment at the present moment has been fully recognised . . . Before recruitment on any large scale takes place, it is necessary, not only to secure a proper proportion of Officers for the personnel at present stationed at units, but to train a further supply of officers to deal with the increase of strength which will be recruited. **Lack of Women Officers in the Areas and at Headquarters undoubtedly precludes the possibility of recruiting in any numbers at the moment. This will necessitate temporary arrangements being made for manning the units from which personnel is transferred with male personnel.**

"(*Signed*) W. C. BERSEY, Lieut.-Colonel."

I leave it to the fair-minded public, whose servant I was, to decide whether after waiting in vain for the necessary accommodation and equipment, after repeatedly drawing attention through the proper channels to the seriousness of the position, there was any other course open to me except to ask leave to resign, and thus decline responsibility for such a grave state of affairs.

I have already pointed out that Lord Weir in a letter to the Prime Minister and to Mr. Winston Churchill declared that I had been given a month's notice by General Paine, and in his speech during the debate in the House of Lords, and in his evidence at the Inquiry, Lord Weir said that General Paine had made repeated complaints to him, and left him under the impression that he was dissatisfied with me (*see* pages 183-185, 248-249).

It will be seen that General Paine, on the other hand, who alone knew anything of my work, has emphatically denied this in his evidence, and on many other occasions. General Paine also denied that he had any intention to give me notice, as he had no cause to blame me, and always felt convinced that I should pull the Corps round if I were given the necessary facilities to do so. As he had refused to allow me to resign only a few days earlier, it seems difficult to see how his words

can, with any accuracy, have been so misconstrued by Lord Weir, Lord Londonderry, Lord Peel, and General Seely (*see* pages 191, 194, 250).

That General Paine did not hold me in any way responsible for the delays in a Department over which I had no jurisdiction is shown by the following extract from his evidence in reply to my Counsel's questions :—

" Mr. Stuart Bevan : Now I think we may go to the 17th of August. That is the date Miss Douglas-Pennant came to see you, and explained that she wished to resign.

" General Paine : Yes.

" Mr. Stuart Bevan : . . . And she told you she wanted to resign ?

" General Paine : Yes.

" Mr. Stuart Bevan : What did you say ?

" General Paine : I told her that I would not think of accepting her resignation or even taking it to the Secretary of State. I said it was her duty to remain on, and get the thing right. I told her then that I was making this change, or had made this change with regard to Colonel Bersey, and as far as I remember I showed her this letter, dated the 13th of August, to show her that he was going, and that another officer was going to be appointed in his place. Whether I told her that day that it had been decided that Colonel Powell was to relieve Colonel Bersey or not I am not certain, but I think I probably did. If it had been settled by that date, it probably was, this letter is dated the 13th.

" Mr. Stuart Bevan : I think you said you told her she must stay on and get things right.

" General Paine : Yes.

" Mr. Stuart Bevan : On that date the 17th August, did you form any opinion as to whether she was capable of getting things right, or likely to ?

" General Paine : Yes, of course I did. I should not have asked her to stay on if I had not. I mean one is not in the habit of asking people to stay on unless you think you will get things right.

" Mr. Stuart Bevan : It follows that you had not changed the opinion you originally formed as to her capabilities.

" General Paine : No. . . . I saw Lord Weir on the subject, and told him that I proposed to relieve Colonel Bersey and try

with another officer in his billet if we could not effect a vast improvement, and a speeding up all round with regard to the Women's organization.

"The Chairman [Lord Wrenbury] : Will you tell me the reasons ?

"General Paine : Well, my Lord, we were not getting on fast enough. It is difficult to say . . . I was very keen and so was Lord Weir on getting this Women's Organization going. **It was life and death to us. We did not get enough men. We were short all over the country.** I came to the conclusion that we might speed things up, and improve the whole thing with another man in Colonel Bersey's place.

"Lord Methuen : You had no feeling that it was attributable in any way to Miss Douglas-Pennant ?

"General Paine : No, my Lord.

"Lord Methuen : Did you give him [Colonel Bersey] another appointment ?

"General Paine : Of course.

"Lord Methuen : But I mean he did not suffer by it ?

"General Paine : Not at all. He was not thrown out or dismissed or anything. He was simply relieved of his appointment, and another officer put in his place in the ordinary course of events.

"Earl of Denbigh : Where did he go ? To another appointment ?

"General Paine : Yes, at once. He was not on half-pay or anything.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan : . . . Never mind the date, we are not concerned with that, but at any time did you tell Lord Weir that Miss Douglas-Pennant had said she must go, and that you pressed her to stay ?

"General Paine : Undoubtedly, I did, and told him that I considered that the organization with Colonel Powell would now run smoothly, and that he would probably see a vast improvement in the course of the next month, or words to that effect.

"Earl of Denbigh : At all events, he knew perfectly well that you were fully in favour of her.

"General Paine : Entirely, that I had no complaints about her, and that I thought under this new management the thing would go ahead rapidly."

The Counsel for the Air Ministry (Mr. Rigby Swift) persistently endeavoured without success to prove that

General Paine had complained of me to Lord Weir. Cross-examined by Mr. Rigby Swift, General Paine stated :—

"Mr. Rigby Swift : She [Miss Douglas-Pennant] was under you in supreme control of the women in the Force ?

"General Paine : Of the Women's welfare, discipline, etc., **not the recruiting.**

"Mr. Rigby Swift : Did you think yourself that the progress of the Force was satisfactory during that time ?

"General Paine : Satisfactory, yes, but up to the time when I saw Lord Weir with reference to relieving Colonel Bersey and substituting somebody else in his place I was not satisfied that it was going as fast as I wanted it to go. I do not say it was not going as fast as it was possible to go, but I do say it was not going as fast as I wanted it to go."

.....

"Mr. Rigby Swift : Had you begun at that time to feel a little doubt about the Commandant ?

"General Paine : No.

"Mr. Rigby Swift : None whatever ?

"General Paine : No."

Mr. Rigby Swift also referred to Lord Weir's statement in the House of Lords that :—

"'He [General Paine] always left me with the definite impression that he had some doubt as to whether Miss Douglas-Pennant was going to be able to pull the Department round successfully.' You do not, of course, dispute the fact that you left Lord Weir with that definite impression ?

"General Paine : I cannot tell what impression I made on Lord Weir.

.....

"Mr. Rigby Swift : Of course, you know when you are talking to people the impression that you wish to leave, do not you ?

"General Paine : Yes.

"Mr. Rigby Swift : Did you never want to give Lord Weir a hint that things were going badly ?

"General Paine : I do not hint.

"Mr. Rigby Swift : I can almost believe that, Sir Godfrey. . . . Did you never tell him that you were afraid Miss Douglas-Pennant would not pull it round ?

"General Paine : No.

"Mr. Rigby Swift: But you were, were not you?

"General Paine: No.

"Mr. Rigby Swift: Never afraid of that?

"General Paine: No, never afraid of it.

"Mr. Rigby Swift: Now just think. I know you put her there, and you had great faith in her.

"General Paine: Yes.

"Mr. Rigby Swift: You believed at the beginning that she would be a success, did not you?

"General Paine: Yes.

"Mr. Rigby Swift: It had begun to dawn on you that she was not going to be a success.

"General Paine: No."

.....

"Mr. Rigby Swift: I want this cleared up, whether before you made that statement to her that if in about a month's time things were not different she or Powell would have to go. You had not then got some doubt about which one it would be who would have to go.

"General Paine: No, I do not think so.

"Mr. Rigby Swift: Did you think Powell would have to go then?

"General Paine: Possibly.

"Mr. Rigby Swift: So that when you went away you were expecting Miss Douglas-Pennant to be superseded unless things altered very considerably in a very short time.

"General Paine: No."

In reply to my Counsel, Mr. Hawke, General Paine again confirmed the statements he had previously made that he had no fault to find with me or my work.

"Mr. Hawke: I want to ask you a few questions . . . First, as to the observations of Lord Weir in the House of Lords on the 30th July. Lord Weir says you always left him with the definite impression that you had some doubt as to whether Miss Douglas-Pennant was going to be a success. Some people prefer facts to impressions. Would you mind telling me did you ever say anything to Lord Weir, expressing any doubt about Miss Douglas-Pennant's success that you can remember?

"General Paine: No, I cannot remember ever saying anything to Lord Weir to the effect that I did not think Miss Pennant could pull it round or anything like that. I always thought she could.

"Mr. Hawke: As a matter of fact, did your opinion so far as the time you were there was concerned ever change about Miss Douglas-Pennant?

"General Paine: No, I always thought she would be able to get the organization on to a sound footing, providing she had the necessary support and could get enough officers to assist her.

"Mr. Hawke: That remains your opinion to the end?

"General Paine: Yes, it is my opinion now.

"Mr. Hawke: You have said in your opinion a good deal of the improvement that showed itself in the Air Force is due to the spade work which she did?

"General Paine: Undoubtedly.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: Let me ask you this general question—at any time during all this period had you any reason for altering the opinion that you told the Committee you originally held that Miss Douglas-Pennant was in every way fitted to hold the post of Commandant?

"General Paine: No.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: And during July and August were you in constant communication with her, and were you well apprised of the general conditions both in the Office and in the Air Force generally?

"General Paine: Yes."

The following Minute was sent by General Paine to Colonel Bersey on July 1st, 1918:—

"Colonel Bersey,

"I am not at all satisfied with the organisation for the administration of the W.R.A.F., and wish you to let me have, as soon as possible, a detailed statement of what officers you have got in your department and what particular subject they are dealing with and are responsible for.

"There seems to be a great deal of overlapping, and unnecessary delay in getting things to the proper quarter for decision, more especially as regards housing, furniture, etc., etc.

"I understand you have lately obtained the services of several men of administrative experience, so what I want to know is the allocation of the various duties.

"G. P.,

"1st July, 1918. M.-G.P."

and followed by another Minute at the end of July, warning Colonel Bersey that he (General Paine) would be compelled to make changes, unless a "vast improvement

took place." A further Minute on August 13th, informed Colonel Bersey of his supersession.

In the Report, their Lordships adjudicate as to whether I was justified in alleging that I had been obstructed in my work. As will be seen, Captain Cherry, in his evidence, declared that Colonel Bersey had refused to allow him to send in the necessary Indents for the equipment so urgently needed for the Officers' Training Centre at Berridge House, Hampstead, until July 18th, 1918, although I had requested him to do so early in June. The fact that I never obtained this equipment during the whole time I was Commandant, corroborates our statement.

That Brigd.-General Fletcher, General Brancker's Deputy, excused his Department's delay in providing equipment on the ground that the Commandant, W.R.A.F., had neglected to send in the Indents, shows the result of Colonel Bersey's action. In his evidence, Col. Bersey admitted that he did not send in the Indents but he declared that certain furniture, which he had ordered the end of May, was available. This statement is inaccurate. I never received this furniture and even if it had been available, it would not have met the case, as it would have been entirely unsuitable for officers and I should not have been allowed to use it. The furniture mentioned by Colonel Bersey had been ordered for a depot hostel for the rank and file. The furniture in dispute, on the other hand, was for the Officers' Training Centre at Berridge House, Hampstead. I made this matter clear when I was cross-examined by Mr. Patrick Hastings (Colonel Bersey's Counsel).

"Mr. Patrick Hastings: Now let us deal with Berridge House. I understand with regard to Berridge House, the what I may call definite complaint you make is this. You wanted furniture. Is that right?

"Miss Douglas-Pennant: I did.

"Mr. Patrick Hastings: "Colonel Bersey was the man who ought to indent for this furniture?

"Miss Douglas-Pennant: He was.

"Mr. Patrick Hastings: He deliberately abstained from indenting. Is that right?

" Miss Douglas-Pennant : He did.

" Mr. Patrick Hastings: ... What evidence have you in mind to show that Colonel Bersey refused to indent . . . What evidence have you in mind in support of that ?

" Miss Douglas-Pennant : I shall bring forward a witness to prove that Colonel Bersey gave instructions that he was not to indent.

" Mr. Patrick Hastings : Gave instructions to what person ?

" Miss Douglas-Pennant : To that Officer whose business it was to do so. That he was not to indent . . . Captain Cherry, who was Liaison Officer . . . and I believe the Officer who worked in his Department was fully aware of the circumstances.

" The Chairman : And is going to be called.

" Miss Douglas-Pennant : Yes.

.....

" Mr. Patrick Hastings [quoting from Colonel Bersey's Minute to the Equipment Department] : 'Authority has been given for the establishment of W.R.A.F. Area Depot Hostels at various places. These Area Depot Hostels are for the collection, uniforming, and despatch of mobile women, arrangements for the enrolment of which are now being completed. Mobile women have to be housed and fed from the day of their enrolment, and until centralised depots for these are provided, none can be enrolled. The urgency of the matter will be illustrated by mentioning the fact that on July 1st next, a large number of W.A.A.C. at present employed with the Royal Air Force Units will be leaving the Air Force Units and returning to the Army, and it is an imperative necessity that mobile women should be enrolled in the W.R.A.F. so as to replace these women. Will you endeavour, please, to find suitable premises, and, immediately you advise us, we will send a W.R.A.F. Officer to inspect any places you think suitable. With regard to London, we have already asked you to arrange for the five houses in Queen's Gate, and this, of course, the most urgent of all.'

" Mr. Patrick Hastings [to Miss Douglas-Pennant] : . . . From what I have read, I suppose you can follow the purpose of that Minute ? "

" Miss Douglas-Pennant : Quite.

" Mr. Patrick Hastings : Do you suggest that was not an honest Minute by Colonel Bersey ? "

" Miss Douglas-Pennant : I suggest to you that you are under a misapprehension. That Minute refers to an entirely different subject. It does not refer to what I refer to in my Case, which is, that Colonel Bersey refused to forward Indents in order to give

me the necessary furniture for training Officers. That refers entirely to Depot Hostels, which is an entirely different matter.

" Mr. Patrick Hastings : Would you do me the honour to listen to my question. Do you suggest that that was, or was not, an honest Minute by Colonel Bersey ?

" Miss Douglas-Pennant : Certainly with regard to the Depot Hostels.

" Mr. Patrick Hastings : There is a postcript to that Minute .... [reading extract] ' Will you please ear-mark and concentrate the necessary furniture in advance in accordance with the scales laid down in F.S. Pub. 14.' Do you suggest that that was an honest portion of the Minute ?

" Miss Douglas-Pennant : So far as I know, yes.

.....

" Mr. Patrick Hastings : It was one of the things you wanted, furniture for the Hostels ?

" Miss Douglas-Pennant : Not so particularly as the Officers. It is to the Officers I am referring.

" Mr. Patrick Hastings : Will you again do me the honour to listen to my question ?

" Miss Douglas-Pennant : **I must not be taken away from my Case. I have not said that Colonel Bersey did not indent for other matters. My complaint was that he did not indent to enable me to train the Officers . . . . . Queen's Gate was never intended for the training of Officers. It was only for a Depot Hostel, an entirely different matter.**

.....

" Mr. Patrick Hastings : Just answer me this. Is it your suggestion that Colonel Bersey did not indent at all, or that he put forward fraudulent indents which he did not desire to have noticed ?

" Miss Douglas-Pennant : By no means. Those indents—so far as I know—I have no reason to think otherwise—are absolutely genuine for Depot Hostels, but my case is that he would not indent in order to enable me to get the Officers trained for the furniture for the Officers' Hostel.*

" Earl of Denbigh : In other words you mean he would not indent for any particular scheme which you selected ?

" Miss Douglas-Pennant : No, I do not mean that.

" Earl of Denbigh : You did not select Queen's Gate, and you did not like it.

" Miss Douglas-Pennant : It was not that, my Lord. My point is that I had to get the Officers, and Colonel Bersey knew it,

* This should read : " my case is that he would not indent in order to enable me to get the furniture for the Officers' Training Hostel."

in order to get out of chaos. It is merely that he would not do anything to enable me to get the Officers.

Questioned by my Counsel, Captain J. P. Cherry, M.C., the Officer on Colonel Bersey's Staff who dealt with this matter, gave evidence as follows :—

"Mr. Buchanan : Did you suggest sending in those Indents when you came back ?

"Captain Cherry : I did.

"Mr. Buchanan : Now, just tell us to whom did you suggest that ?

"Captain Cherry : I went in to Colonel Bersey's room to report, in a more or less short way, what we had done, and the work we had carried out, and I said 'Do you think we should put in Indents now ?' And he said, 'No, not now ; it is quite all right.'

"Mr. Buchanan : You were of opinion at that time that you could prepare those Indents ?

"Captain Cherry : Yes.

"Mr. Buchanan : When you speak of Indents you mean detailed Indents on the Army Form which, I think, is G. 997 ?

"Captain Cherry : Army Form G. 997, yes.

"Mr. Buchanan : That is what you are referring to when you refer to Indents which you could put in ?

"Captain Cherry : Yes.

"Mr. Buchanan : You told us that on that occasion Colonel Bersey said he would tell you when to do it ?

"Captain Cherry : He told me he would let me know when I was to put the Indents in.

"Mr. Buchanan : Did you ask him subsequently on other occasions whether you should put those Indents forward ?

"Captain Cherry : Yes, I jogged his memory on one or two occasions about those Indents.

"Mr. Buchanan : May I remind your Lordship of the Minute read the other day from Colonel Bersey, dated 16th July, saying that detailed Indents for each of the five schemes are being prepared. I was asking Captain Cherry upon that if there was any reason why they should not have been prepared in June."

In the Report, however, their Lordships state—

"We take Berridge House (Officers' Training Scheme) as a case of alleged obstruction which we can test. She (Miss Douglas-Pennant) says that Colonel Bersey gave her no assistance in this matter. Put her off with excuses and intended to make

success on her part impossible. . . . She says that Colonel Bersey obstructed her—tried to foil her efforts, would not indent for the requisite furniture, and so on. He denies this altogether. There is documentary evidence in the matter."

Their Lordships then quote from several Minutes which passed between Colonel Bersey and the Equipment Department at the time, but as these Minutes did not include the necessary Indents, *i.e.*, Requisition Lists, we were unable to obtain the furniture and equipment which would have enabled me to start the training scheme.

It will be remembered (*see* pages 18, 97-99) that I asked Colonel Bersey to send in the Indents early in June. In spite of the fact that the Indents were not supplied until July 17th, 1918, their Lordships, in the Report, appear to regard the six weeks delay as negligible, and decide as follows :—

"The indents for the furniture were issued on July 17th or 19th. In our opinion these minutes completely destroy Miss Douglas-Pennant's story of obstruction by Colonel Bersey in respect of Berridge House. They were all put to her in cross-examination. She had no answer to make to them.

"We FIND that her charges of obstruction are not substantiated."

It is difficult to understand why Lord Methuen and Lord Denbigh, both soldiers who must have had some practical experience of these details in the past, did not explain to Lord Wrenbury and the civilian members of the Court that without Indents Minutes were useless, and that by neglecting to forward the Indents (*i.e.* Requisition Lists), the provision of equipment would inevitably and automatically be held up under the Army and Air Force Regulations. As to whether I had "no answer to make" when cross-examined regarding these Indents I can only refer to my evidence quoted above (*see* page 275).

The fact remains that I did not receive the necessary accommodation, furniture, and equipment to enable me during the time I was Commandant to open the Training Centre. The posting out every three weeks of about 150 W.R.A.F. officers to supervise the W.R.A.F. working in the camps was rendered impossible. The whole of the

scheme for training the rank and file, as well as for the officers, was thus held up.

The Equipment Department declared in a Minute that the accommodation which had been found and suggested by me and Captain Cherry on June 11th, 1918, was, to quote the words used, "*not considered suitable, as it is situated in that particular portion of Hampstead that is wholly unsuited for quartering and accommodation.*" The surroundings were also described as "*unhealthy.*" It seems incredible that the finest residential quarter of the healthiest suburb of London should be characterized as "unhealthy."

It will be remembered that Brig.-General Fletcher, (Equipment Department) declared that these houses, in addition, were also "*full of dry rot,*" although at a later stage, on being pressed by General Paine to provide the accommodation so urgently needed, he brought forward these identical premises as an alternative and improved scheme (*see* page 99).

Owing to these obstructions, the vast building—Berridge House, so generously loaned by the National Society, stood empty and useless from the first week in June until the second week in September, just after my dismissal.

On the other hand, General Paine was informed in June, 1918, in a Minute signed by Colonel H. S. Ebben (Colonel Bersey's immediate superior officer) that

"Berridge House is at West Hampstead. It has already been taken over, and will be occupied as a school from to-morrow."

Further expenditure of public money was unnecessarily incurred, as in order to train officers we were obliged to obtain furnished premises from the London County Council.

If it had not been for the courtesy and public spirit of the London County Council, I should not have been able to train the 480 W.R.A.F. Officers I succeeded in training during the ten weeks I was Commandant.

It is difficult to describe how disheartening it was to see such splendid opportunities thrown away at a time of national peril when prompt action was vital.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"Irrelevant" and "Irregular"?

Delay in Providing Uniforms.

As an illustration of further obstruction, I brought before their Lordships the question of W.R.A.F. clothing. I was most anxious that the Court should enquire fully into this matter, and probe the reasons which led the Equipment Dept. to take certain steps without the knowledge or consent of General Paine and myself, although I was held responsible for their action.

Their Lordships decided that this matter "was irrelevant," nevertheless I venture to restate it.

I have already pointed out that my difficulties were greatly increased by the fact that I was not able to obtain any uniforms for the W.R.A.F. during the time I was Commandant, with the exception of a few suits. This gave rise to serious dissatisfaction and was the cause of several strikes among the women, who resented being forced to wear their own clothes when engaged on very rough and dirty work. The O.C's. in the Air Force Camps found great difficulty in maintaining discipline as it was impossible to identify members of the W.R.A.F. at night.

It will be remembered (*see* page 123) that after a visit paid by the Clothing Controller to the firm to whom the contract for the uniforms had been given, she had expressed her doubts as to the possibility of the contract being quickly and satisfactorily completed. It was shortly after receiving this report that Colonel Bersey had agreed without my knowledge to hand over to the Equipment Department the whole of the inspection of the W.R.A.F. Clothing which it was the duty of the Clothing Controller to carry out, and for which I was held responsible by General Paine.

The question of W.R.A.F. Clothing came up before the House of Commons Select Committee on National

Expenditure (Chairman—Sir Frederick Banbury, M.P.) in June, 1919, when that Committee was investigating the financial administration of the Air Ministry. That Committee elicited the fact that a large contract for 30,000 uniforms and 30,000 overcoats had been given to a firm of macintosh makers without any other tender being invited for the pattern chosen.

The W.R.A.F. Clothing Controller (Miss O'Sullivan), Colonel Latimer, Mr. E. H. Cockburn (late Temporary Major, Colonel Bersey's Department), Captain J. P. Cherry, and myself were called before the Select Committee to explain matters.

Miss O'Sullivan when questioned by the Select Committee alleged that this contract (for 30,000 uniforms and 30,000 overcoats) as well as for the material selected had been given to a Manchester firm of macintosh makers who were also cloth manufacturers. Miss O'Sullivan declared that in spite of the fact that the Committee had rejected the sample sent in by this firm and had unanimously selected the pattern garment provided by another firm, the order was given to the Manchester firm. Miss O'Sullivan also declared that this firm had never made women's coats and skirts before, and were unable to deliver the uniforms during the whole time I was Commandant, and that when the first garments were received they were not up to standard. The Report of the Select Committee published in a White Paper, No. 168, August 1919, gives details of the evidence heard of which the following is an extract:—

> "By direction of Miss Douglas-Pennant, who was then Commandant of the W.R.A.F., the Clothing Controller went to Manchester and she stated that the coat frocks were being cut on the bias instead of on the straight; this course, if pursued, would have resulted in the saving to the advantage of the contractor of about ¾-yard on each garment.* According to the contract, payment was to be made for 3 yards 24 inches of cloth on each garment.
>
> "The Sub-Committee sent for the Assistant Director of Army Contracts at the War Office, and asked him if it was correct

* This was denied later by the Head of the Firm during an Inquiry held by the Air Ministry, August, 1919 (*see* Blue Book, Cmd. 347).

that the contract had been given to the firm in question without having been put up to public competition. He replied that it was so. Asked for the reason for doing this, he replied that Major Cockburn, of the Air Ministry, had informed him that only a particular kind of cloth would be accepted by the Air Ministry, and the witness stated that no other firm was able to supply this particular cloth [*see* pages 12-13]. The Assistant Director further stated that there was in addition considerable difficulty at that time in getting contractors to tender, as a very large amount of this class of work was being carried out for the Government.

"Asked if he had taken any steps to obtain this kind of cloth from other people, he replied that he had asked the Director of Wool Textile Production at Bradford to provide the cloth, but that this gentleman had replied that it was not possible to procure deliveries for commencement earlier than three to four months, and that the material would be piece dyed, price 9s. 6d. a yard.

"Asked why it was that the firm in question could obtain material which the Director of Wool Textile Production, who was in control of the whole wool production of the country, could not obtain, he replied that he could not really answer, but that in his opinion it was a remarkable thing. He further stated that the firm in question were able to supply it at 7*s.* $7\frac{3}{4}$*d.* a yard.

NOTE.—*The full account of this incident and of the whole question of the W.R.A.F. Clothing, so far as it concerned me, will be found in Part I., Chapter II., and in Part II., Chapter XIV. (see also Blue Book, Cmd. 347).* V.D.-P.

The Clothing Controller also testified that the work of inspection was removed from the W.R.A.F. to the Equipment Department without my knowledge or consent, though I was held responsible for it, and that 40 men were employed by that department to do what 12 women could easily have accomplished (*see* page 130).

The removal of the inspection of W.R.A.F. Clothing and the sudden reversal of the arrangement arrived at between us, was also inquired into by the Select Committee, who stated in their report "the Sub-Committee have examined the file, and find that it confirms Miss Douglas-Pennant's statement." (*See* pages 4-6 Third Report of the Select Committee on National Expenditure, August 1919.)

Serious allegations made by the Clothing Controller (Miss E. O'Sullivan) regarding the reckless waste of public money and wanton destruction of valuable stores of clothing also came before the Select Committee on National Expenditure. The Report of that Committee, published August, 1919, aroused so much comment that the Air Ministry was obliged to set up an Inquiry into the W.R.A.F. Clothing Department. This Air Ministry Inquiry, to which I was subpoenaed as a witness, was held in August, 1919, two months before the House of Lords Inquiry into my case opened. Several points which touched on my case were not entered into by the Air Ministry Court in the belief that the House of Lords Committee would deal with them (*see* page 224).

As certain matters concerning the question of W.R.A.F Clothing had influenced me in my decision to ask permission to resign, and as I have been repeatedly blamed for the delay in providing uniforms, I was most anxious that the House of Lords Committee should investigate this matter fully, and give me an opportunity of clearing myself (*see* pages 123-132).

My Counsel drew their Lordships' attention to Colonel Bersey's Minute, handing over the inspection of W.R.A.F. Clothing to the Equipment Department without my knowledge, and questioned me regarding it, as follows :—

"Mr. Stuart Bevan : The file which was referred to yesterday was C.W. 3307. There appears to be another file D. 196 subject—'Clothing for W.R.A.F's. Inspection of cloth and finished garments,' and in that file there is a Minute which is not numbered, signed by Colonel Bersey, dated the 19th of July, 1918, and it is addressed to Q. 5. [Equipment Department] and it is in these terms 'We shall be more than glad of your assistance.' That is Q. 5's assistance with regard to inspection. 'Will you undertake this entirely, and we will assist to find the staff as may be necessary. That will be under your control.' That Minute, Miss Douglas-Pennant, is dated the 19th July. You told us that your interview with Colonel Bersey on the question of the Clothing inspection was on the 27th. Is that right ?

"Miss Douglas-Pennant : May I just verify it ?

"Mr. Stuart Bevan : I think you may take it from me.

"Miss Douglas-Pennant : Yes, I am sure it is.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: At that interview did either of those gentlemen inform you of this instruction that had been given as far back as the 19th July?

"Miss Douglas-Pennant: No, I had no idea at all.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: And were you aware when you were discussing the matter and coming to an agreement on the 27th that the position had in fact been determined on the 19th in this way, and that Q. 5. should inspect?

"Miss Douglas-Pennant: No, I had no idea whatever.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: When did you first hear of the existence of this Minute of Colonel Bersey's?

"Miss Douglas-Pennant: I think it was when I visited Wellington Street, and to my surprise found the viewing in the hands of a large body of men. I think 35 or 40. I was told they were members of a Labour Battalion.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: Was that after the agreement of the 27th July?

"Miss Douglas-Pennant: Oh yes.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: Can you tell us whether it was after the date in August which is put at the 8th or 9th when Colonel Bersey handed you a Minute for signature. When he handed you this file for signature?

"Miss Douglas-Pennant: Yes.

"Mr. Carthew [Colonel Bersey's Counsel]: Is that the Clothing file?

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: They are both Clothing files—two files dealing with the one subject."

In view of the fact that the Air Ministry Court of Inquiry had stated in their findings that the inspection of Clothing was removed without my knowledge or consent, I had relied on the House of Lords Committee to clear up the reason for keeping two files. For the sake of both parties it seemed necessary that Colonel Bersey should be given an opportunity of explaining what induced him to enter into a private agreement with the Equipment Department, while at the same time he informed me that he knew nothing of any such arrangement.

Without questioning Colonel Bersey's reasons, I may be allowed to point out that this action on his part caused serious friction and misunderstanding in my Department for which I could not account at the time.

It led the O.C's and the W.R.A.F. in the areas to believe that I was the cause of the delay in providing the uniforms; it led the Clothing Controller to assume that I had deceived her, and had authorised Colonel Bersey to hand over her duties to the Equipment Department, while at the same time she was informed that she was responsible for the inspection of Clothing. It cannot be wondered at that Miss O'Sullivan felt that she was treated with injustice, and the fact that she did not receive any reply from me to her five urgent letters made her assume that I was an impossible and unbusiness-like woman (*see* page 131).

It was not until Colonel Bersey left that she discovered that I had no knowledge of the Minutes on the extra file which had passed between him and the Equipment Department; and that I had never received her letters as they were found in Colonel Bersey's room. Miss O'Sullivan then realised that I had acted in good faith throughout.

From Colonel Bersey's evidence it is plain that he did not find me difficult to work with, and that his action cannot have been due to any friction or lack of co-operation on my part.

"Mr. Hawke: Did she [Miss Douglas-Pennant] assist you about the Office organization?

"Colonel Bersey: Yes.

"Mr. Hawke: In her schemes for this re-organization and Camp re-organization did you get a bit tired of her?

"Colonel Bersey: No.

"Mr. Hawke: On the 13th August you had General Paine's Minute, and one would not be surprised if you were fed up then? [*see* page 272].

"Colonel Bersey: Not necessarily with her.

"Mr. Hawke: But before that?

"Colonel Bersey: No.

"Mr. Hawke: Satisfied that she was doing her work?

"Colonel Bersey: Undoubtedly working very hard, and I am sure doing her best.

"Mr. Hawke: Satisfied that she was doing her best to co-operate with you?

"Colonel Bersey: I am sure she was.

"Mr. Hawke: And improve the position?

"Colonel Bersey: I am sure she was.

.....

"Mr. Hawke: As far as Officers were concerned it was her doing, her suggestion?

"Colonel Bersey: Unquestionably, yes."

As to whether the Equipment Department or my Department did the viewing of the Clothing seemed to me to be the least important point. My sole object was to ensure that the clothing for which I was held responsible was satisfactorily delivered up to the standard of the "sealed" pattern. I also believed that in view of the man-power shortage it was my duty to see that the women did the work entrusted to them. The Equipment Department apparently concurred, and I never suspected any friction at the time.

Every allowance must be made for the fact that Brig.-General Fletcher and Lt.-Colonel O. W. Latimer, who had only lately been promoted from the ranks, to the high and responsible posts they held, may not have been aware of the ordinary official procedure in these matters, but it seems unaccountable that the Equipment Department should have authorised unbusinesslike and misleading methods. It is equally unintelligible that the whole of the uniform, equipment, and accommodation for the W.R.A.F. should have been held up until I was dismissed.

It is a curious coincidence that when General Brancker dismissed me he told me that "no one can do any work while you are about the place," and that Brig.-General Fletcher of the Equipment Department gave the same reason when he dismissed Miss O'Sullivan, the Controller of the Clothing Department, when she felt obliged to report the irregularities which she alleged were taking place in her Department under the Equipment Department (*see* page 282).

Their Lordships had before them the Minutes quoted on pages 129, 130, and when my Counsel opened this

matter Lord Kintore informed him that he had already read the Report of the Air Ministry Clothing Inquiry.

"Earl of Kintore: I have waded through all that evidence and the findings. If I had known I was to have the advantage of listening to you I should not have done it."

My surprise was great, therefore, when on my Counsel, Mr. Hawke, beginning to cross-examine Colonel Bersey as to his reasons for handing over the inspection of the W.R.A.F. Clothing to the Equipment Department without my knowledge, the Chairman, Lord Wrenbury, intervened, after consulting with Lord Kintore, and in spite of my Counsel's protests decided that this matter was irrelevant.

"Chairman: Mr. Hawke, the Committee do not think this is a relevant matter.

"Mr. Hawke: Of course, in that case I drop it, but I had not concluded my questions.

"Chairman: I have consulted every member of the Committee, and they all think we are wasting time.

"Mr. Hawke: I had not concluded my questions.

"Chairman: I tell you what we think.

"Mr. Hawke: That results in my asking no further questions. I am merely endeavouring to enquire into the circumstances surrounding this dismissal."

In the Report their Lordships declare:—

"There is another story about obstruction in respect of Clothing. We do not think it necessary to consider it in detail. It has been dealt with in a previous Inquiry ordered by the Air Council into matters raised by Miss O'Sullivan. Miss Douglas-Pennant's charges of obstruction are, we think, sufficiently dealt with by a critical examination of the Berridge House case. We selected the case of Berridge House for that purpose. We find that her charges of obstruction are not substantiated."

From the above verdict it would appear that I had brought forward reckless statements alleging obstruction —that their Lordships had selected a typical case, *i.e.*, Berridge House Indents (*see* pages 96-100, 273) for investigation which had proved that my allegations were entirely unfounded, and that in view of this exposure it was unnecessary to enter into the further case in respect of clothing.

It is difficult to understand why the members of a Committee appointed to enquire and search out the truth should have refused to allow this question of Clothing so material to my case to be investigated, and should have accepted without question and inquiry the decision of the Air Ministry which was one of the opposing parties.

Failure to issue the W.R.A.F. Regulations.

Another serious difficulty which had greatly impeded the organization of the W.R.A.F. had been the holding up of the issue of the revised Handbook of Regulations, known as F.S. Pub. 14. The first edition had been widely circulated to all Commanding Officers, and to others concerned with the administration of the W.R.A.F. when the Corps was set up. The Employment Exchanges relied on it for information regarding recruits, as it contained full details of the rates of pay for skilled and unskilled women in the various categories in which they were employed by the Air Ministry.

Attention had been drawn to this serious obstacle by the Air Force Officer in charge of recruiting for the W.R.A.F. To quote his words—

> **"The Ministry of Labour cannot recruit if they have not got our official instructions as to the conditions, etc."** (*see* page 112).

As the unaccountable delay in printing the amended edition of these Regulations has had such serious consequences for me, and as I have been repeatedly blamed for the fact that they were held up, I may perhaps be forgiven for entering into this matter in detail, in order that the true circumstances may be known.

When Brigd.-General Guy Livingston gave me definitely to understand at our first interview (*see* page 29) that the W.R.A.F. could not succeed unless I worked under him and Colonel Bersey, I told General Paine that my difficulties were complicated by the fact that the revised Regulations had not yet been issued. The Commanding Officers in the Air Force Areas therefore were under the impression that the old order of things existed, and that Colonel Bersey was in sole control, under General Livingston. General Paine informed

me that Colonel Bersey had assured him that the W.R.A.F. Regulations were actually in proof and would be issued within a fortnight. The following Minute from General Paine to the Head of the Labour Ministry Employment Exchanges Department, who had complained of the delay, shows that the same position existed a month later :—

Copy.

" Air Ministry,
" Strand, W.C. 2,
" 12. 7. 18.

" To Lieut.-Com. J. B. Adams,
" Ministry of Labour,
" Queen Anne's Chambers,
" Westminster.

" Dear Adams,

" I have your letter and enclosure of the 10th instant regarding recruiting of women for the W.R.A.F.

" The revised F.S. Publication dealing with the Constitution generally of the W.R.A.F. is now in full draft, and will be going to the Printers for proof on Monday morning. We may, therefore, expect to have this ready for issue in about a fortnight. Meantime, however, I do not think this need delay recruiting or the additional arrangements you propose to make, as to the procedure for bringing women to the Selection Boards, and for their subsequent posting, is already laid down, and has in fact been operative for some weeks.

" (*Signed*) G. M. PAINE,
M.-G.P."

I have already pointed out, that for some reason unexplained at the time, the W.R.A.F. Regulations were, however, held up, and were not issued until after my dismissal.

In view of my own difficulties, as well as the repeated complaints which reached me from the Ministry of Labour and other Departments, I urged Colonel Bersey to speed up the issue of the Regulations. He assured me that the delay in printing was only caused by war-time pressure, and that the matter would be shortly completed. I knew from past experience as an Insurance Commissioner that the head of H.M. Stationery Office, which Department I took for granted was dealing with the matter, would do

his utmost to expedite any urgent work. I therefore suggested that he should be approached and his assistance enlisted.

It was not until December 1920, however, that the true reason for the delay in issuing these Regulations was brought to light. In the Fourth Report of the Committee of Public Accounts, the action of Brigd.-General Guy Livingston and the Air Minister are criticised for having placed a large contract for the printing of the Royal Air Force Muster Roll, and among other items, the W.R.A.F. Regulations, with a private firm of map printers who were unaccustomed to the work required and failed to carry it out. The cost was excessive—the Treasury refused to pass the Accounts—questions were asked in the House of Commons. The following is an extract from the Report of the Public Accounts Committee, regarding the W.R.A.F. Regulations and this contract as a whole:—

> "The same firm were employed to print pamphlets with regard to the recruitment of the Women's Royal Air Force, the amount which would have been saved on an account for £509 11*s.* 8*d.* by using the ordinary mode of performing the work being £426 2*s.* 5*d.*, this being partly accounted for by the fact that the Stationery Office would have employed a cheaper style of printing.
>
> "We were surprised that the Minister could have been persuaded that any private firm could execute work more quickly than it could have been arranged by the Stationery Office, who at the time, as we were informed, were practically controlling the printing resources of London, and we requested the Officer concerned to appear before us and explain the transaction. He gave us an assurance that at the time when it occurred, he was in no way connected with the firm, though he subsequently became so about February or March, 1919. . . .
>
> "It will be seen from Appendix 31, that so far as the records show, approval was not asked and obtained to close with the firm; that no written instructions covering such points as price or time of delivery which was the whole essence of the matter, were given to it, and that no definite contract was made . . .
>
> "**The result of the action taken was, that the cost was largely increased while the rate of delivery, so far from being accelerated, was positively impeded**—a very serious error of

judgment was in fact committed both by the Minister and by the Officer concerned.

"The circumstances are so serious that it is not without hesitation that we refrain from recommending disallowance."

Owing to the fact that these W.R.A.F. Regulations (though in full draft at the time, in the revised form ordered by the Air Council) had not yet been actually issued and distributed, their Lordships decided in their Report that the unrevised Regulations still held the field and were "the operative Regulations of the Force." As these unamended Regulations contained no mention of a Commandant, their Lordships hold further that they (the Regulations) "did not allow of the existence of a Commandant as distinguished from a Chief Superintendent."

It will be seen from General Paine's evidence that, when questioned regarding my appointment, there was no doubt, in his opinion, that I was duly appointed Commandant, W.R.A.F., by the Air Council :—

"Lord Wrenbury : Just tell me what you mean by 'supreme' [control]. That means ungoverned by somebody. Tell us the person to whom she was not to be subject ?

"General Paine : She was to have access to the Master-General of Personnel, who was in a similar position to the Second Sea Lord of the Admiralty. That is the Officer of the Air Council, who was responsible to the Secretary of State for personnel generally.

"Lord Wrenbury : Was she to be subject to anybody else ?

"General Paine : She was to work in co-operation with the Department known as M.3.

"Lord Wrenbury : Supposing there was a difference of opinion between her and M.3. what was to happen ?

"General Paine : She was to come to me.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan : And to no one else ?

"General Paine : And no one else.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan : Now before her appointment there had been a Superintendent ?

"General Paine : Yes.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan : What was the Superintendent's position —to whom was she subordinate ?

"General Paine: I really do not know. I did not appoint her. She was there when I took over the duties. She was working, as far as I remember, under General Livingston."

.....

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: Did the Superintendent have the corresponding rank of Brigadier-General in the Royal Air Force?

"General Paine: No.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: Do you remember what her corresponding rank was, or whether she had any corresponding rank at all?

"General Paine: No, I do not think she was given any rank.

Cross-examined by Mr. Rigby Swift: "You have told us of the introduction of Miss Douglas-Pennant to the Air Ministry—am I right in supposing at that time Lord Rothermere was the Secretary of State?

"General Paine: He was.

"Mr. Rigby Swift: You, subject to the approval of the Air Council, appointed her?

"General Paine: Yes.

"Mr. Rigby Swift: I do not know at all whether you could have appointed her without the approval of the Air Council?

"General Paine: As far as I remember I had the appointing of the whole Personnel up to the rank of Brigd.-General. All appointments above the rank of Brigd.-General had to be confirmed by other Members of the Air Council. It might be one other Member, or by the Air Council as a whole. Probably one other Member.

"Mr. Rigby Swift: That means you could have appointed her?

"General Paine: No, she held the relative rank of Brigd.-General.

"Mr. Rigby Swift: I suppose the same thing applies to dismissing or superseding. You could neither dismiss or supersede her without going to the Air Council, or to one Member of it?

"General Paine: No, certainly not."

Later on my Counsel declared that my appointment as Commandant was in order:—

"Lord Wrenbury: There is no question at all raised upon it in this sense—that your opponents do not say that she did not render service to the W.R.A.F. in a position called that of Commandant. You do not dispute that, Mr. Swift?

"Mr. Rigby Swift: No, my Lord.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: And that she was recognised as entitled to hold the position of Commandant by Sir Godfrey Paine, by the Secretary of State, and by the Air Council?

"Chairman [Lord Wrenbury]: Yes.

"Mr. Rigby Swift: **Certainly we have never disputed that.**

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: That clears it up.

"Mr. Rigby Swift: There has never been any doubt about it. There was nothing to fear."

In view of these facts it is all the more difficult to understand why their Lordships, in the Report, decided as follows:—

"The facts are that Miss Douglas-Pennant never had a formal appointment, but that acting no doubt upon the authority of May 2nd, Sir Godfrey Paine at a later date, by some action or other of which we have no exact particulars, employed Miss Douglas-Pennant (upon the footing of the temporary loan which the Welsh Insurance Commission had made of her services) to act in the organisation of the Women's Royal Air Force, and in that Service, whether he could rightly do so or not, relieved her to some extent at any rate of that provision of F.S. Pub. 14, which provided that the Women's Royal Air Force should be 'controlled by the Director of Manning.' But in no larger sense was Miss Douglas-Pennant invested with an office, and her office was not an office permanent in its character, to which the King's Regulations or the provision of F.S. Pub. 14, as to removal for misconduct applies. She never signed the form of enrolment; she never was enrolled, and if she wore without objection, as we believe she did, the uniform of the Women's Royal Air Force, that is but another illustration of the want of system in the proceedings of the Air Ministry.

"F.S. Pub. 14 seemingly constituted until November, 1918 (when revised Regulations were published), the operative Regulations of the Force. It did not allow of the existence of a Commandant (as distinguished from a Chief Superintendent) free from (as distinguished from subject to) control by the Director of Manning, and although no one disputes that Sir Godfrey Paine could and did give Miss Douglas-Pennant in her service the freedom for which she contends, yet it remains that her employment was only a temporary employment by way of loan. She never was enrolled into or clothed with an office in a Service from which she could be removed only as provided by the King's Regulations or by F.S. Pub. 14. The Minister could dispense with her services

at any time, if in the honest exercise of his discretion and in the interests of the Public Service, he thought right to do so."

It seems difficult to appreciate the precise point of view which led the Military Members of the Committee (Field-Marshal Lord Methuen and Lord Denbigh) to acquiesce in a decision which entirely reversed the ordinary military procedure of a disciplined Force. On the grounds that certain regulations, passed by the Air Council, were not actually in print, their Lordships decided that an officer, in charge of a Department, who held, by decision of the Air Council, the rank of Brigd.-General, should work under the control of the subordinate officers of Brigd.-General Livingston's Department.

I thus found myself placed at the outset of the Inquiry in the position of an insubordinate official who had assumed authority to which she was not entitled under the W.R.A.F. Regulations, and who, to quote from their Lordships' Report, was "a person who resented any control."

In view of this censure, I must point out that I accepted the post of Commandant in all good faith when invited to do so by the Air Council, and I was informed that I was to work under the direct orders of the Master-General of Personnel. I did so, and he never found fault with me or my work. I never had any friction with other Departments, and was unaware, until my dismissal, that any was alleged (*see* pages 129, 147, 150).

There is plenty of evidence to show that up to the date of their Lordships' Report, my appointment as Commandant was never before called in question. There is the Minute of the Air Council confirming it on the 2nd May, 1918, there is the official notice issued immediately afterwards to the Press by the Air Council, announcing my appointment, and during the time I was in the W.R.A.F. the Air Ministry refused to accept any but my signature as Commandant for official instructions, Records and other documents.

Lord Weir appeared to have no doubt whatever on this point. In his evidence he stated that he held me as

Commandant responsible for the W.R.A.F. To quote his words :—

" As soon as she did become Commandant she was a member of a disciplined Force. She became subject to the rules of discipline. She was appointed Commandant of the Women's Royal Air Force."

The following correspondence which passed between Lord Rothermere (Secretary of State for Air at the time of my appointment) and General Paine (*see* page 1), and General Paine's letter to me, seem to show clearly that I was appointed Commandant.

Copy. " 19th April, 1918.

" Dear Lord Rothermere,

" I have had the names of seven ladies sent to me by Miss Violet Markham, and all, or most of them, appear to be suitable for the post of Commandant for the W.R.A.F.

" To make doubly sure, I have asked Miss Durham, Ministry of Labour, her opinion on these names, and she has written a very interesting letter, recommending as probably the most suitable out of the seven—all of whom have very good credentials—the name of Miss Violet Douglas-Pennant. She has been a Commissioner for Wales under the N.H.I. Commission, and I understand draws the salary of £1,000 a year, so I do not know if she will be prepared to come. She has undoubtedly the qualities that we require, and is spoken of very highly indeed by all who know her.

" If you concur, I will approach this lady, and see if she is willing to take the post of Commandant of the W.R.A.F. If she agrees, I will bring the matter before the Council for confirmation at the next meeting.

" Yours sincerely,

(*Signed*) GODFREY PAINE."

" Secretary of State for Air."

Copy. " Hemster,

" Beneden,

" 21st April, 1918.

" My Dear Paine,

" I quite agree about Miss Pennant.

" Will you mention matter to Baird, and then if Miss Pennant is willing, get formal sanction at Air Council Meeting.

" Yours very faithfully,

(*Signed*) ROTHERMERE."

" My cold is very bad."

"Air Ministry,
"Strand, W.C. 2,
"22nd April, 1918.

"Dear Miss Violet Pennant,

"You will have heard of the Women's Royal Air Force, which has just been formed to recruit 30,000 women to replace men in the R.A.F.

"We have now under consideration the appointment of a Commandant of the Corps, and are anxious to secure the most capable woman available for the position. Your name has been mentioned to me, and if you are willing to entertain the appointment I would be glad if you would kindly call and see me any time convenient to yourself. Perhaps you will ring me on the telephone (Regent 8000, Extension 210).

"You will appreciate that the post is a most important one, and that the success of the Corps must be very largely dependent upon the Woman Officer at its head.

"Yours very truly,

"(*Signed*) G. M. PAINE.

"The Hon. Violet Douglas-Pennant,
"National Health Insurance Commission,
"Buckingham Gate."

In view of their Lordships' decision, it appears to follow that the post of Deputy Commandant (held by Miss Pratt), that of Assistant Commandant (held by Mrs. Beatty and Miss K. Andrew) and other senior posts, were also irregular, and did not in fact exist. It would also seem clear that the appointment of my successor, Mrs. Gwynne Vaughan, as Commandant, was a further irregularity, as the copies of the revised Regulations, which are thus pronounced by their Lordships to be the indispensable authority, were not issued until November, 1918, three months after she assumed command. If, under the ruling of the Court, my successor was also only entitled to hold the subordinate post of Chief Superintendent, a further complication appears to be created in this tangle of alleged irregularities. The position of the W.R.A.F. becomes even more indefinite, as owing to the fact that the Department M.3 (formerly under the control of General Livingston, the Director of Manning and Colonel Bersey) was abolished shortly after my

dismissal, the Chief Superintendent and the W.R.A.F. were thus deprived of the supervision of the Department set up specially under the *unrevised* Regulations to control them.

It would hardly seem possible that the welfare of a large force of women should thus be left by the Air Ministry until about the time of the Armistice under the control of a subordinate officer, with no status or executive power.

It will be seen that their Lordships, in adjudicating that the post of Commandant did not exist, carried the matter even further in their Report, **and decide that not only was I never Commandant, but that I never was in the W.R.A.F. and, further, that I was not entitled to wear the uniform.**

On the first day of the Inquiry, Lord Kintore drew attention to this matter, and remarked with severe significance :—

> **"I see cases very often of men arrested and sentenced for wearing a uniform and decorations they were not entitled to."**

On the other hand, I submit that I was ordered to wear the uniform and the badges of Commandant, W.R.A.F., and that I received the £20—allowance for uniform, in common with the other W.R.A.F. officers, and that under no existing circumstances could I with any justice be regarded as an impostor.

With regard to my appointment there is the indisputable fact that the Air Ministry urged me to give up highly responsible and administrative work as an Insurance Commissioner in order to become Commandant, W.R.A.F. I must also point out that the Lord Chancellor, during the course of his speech in the House of Lords on May 28th, 1919, declared :—

> " she undertook obligations and she became amenable to the rules—the well-known rules of discipline in the Service."

and further, that the Air Ministry, in its Statement of Case for the Inquiry, referred to me, invariably, throughout as the Commandant, W.R.A.F.

In view of this it seems all the more incredible and unjust that many months later I should be informed by the verdict of the Court, that not only had I never been Commandant, but that I had never been in the W.R.A.F. and had only served in a subordinate civilian post without any status or powers.

Their Lordships appear to base their decision on the ground that I did not sign an enrolment form. The facts are as follows :—

It will be remembered (*see* pages 31-32) that before I accepted the appointment of Commandant, I made special enquiries as to whether I ought to sign any documents in order to complete the matter. I was assured that as I had already been appointed by the Air Council, this was unnecessary, as the only Form in use for officers was an Application Form for enrolment, giving assurances that the candidates were of British birth and good character, and would accept service on the terms laid down in the Regulations. Before I accepted the post, I asked particularly for information as to my exact position under the Regulations, and my liabilities for Service, in the event of my wishing to resign. I was informed by General Paine's secretary that I could not resign without permission, and that I was bound to serve "for the period of the war, or for a year, whichever was the longer period." Having decided to take the appointment, I accepted these terms without question. I never for one moment believed that, eighteen months afterwards, my appointment by the Air Council would be repudiated, in spite of all the evidence to show that it had been duly made and agreed.

It should be noted that under the Regulations governing the W.R.A.F. we were unable to resign without permission. This permission had been refused me a few days before my dismissal with the concurrence of Lord Weir. Surely it is contrary to elementary justice that Regulations should be enforced to retain compulsorily an Officer's services and should then be set aside in order to dismiss the Officer in question at a moment's notice under pressure of influence from the outside. If, according to their Lordships' ruling I was

not a member of the Force, and therefore, was not entitled to the protection of the Regulations which lay down that summary dismissal can only be resorted to in cases of grave misconduct after a full Inquiry, it must surely follow that Lord Weir had no right to refuse my resignation and compel my service before dismissing me a few days later without any enquiry.

It seems difficult to understand that those members of the Court of Inquiry who were familiar with departmental procedure, do not appear to have realised that the technical term "on loan" had no special significance in my case to govern their decision. I was in exactly the same position as a vast number of other persons who joined the fighting services and left their Civilian employment in the Government Service, and were therefore technically "on loan." In order to prevent confusion and unnecessary accounting complications, their salaries, in excess of the Navy, Army, or Air Force pay, remained on the list of the particular Department which up to date had employed them, and which had already received, under the previous year's Estimates, the Treasury Vote to cover those salaries. This procedure had been decided on at the outset of the war, as it was obviously impossible to keep pace with the constant changes resulting from the hurried calling-up of men of military age.

This arrangement was explained to me at the time that I joined the W.R.A.F. I discussed the matter with the late Sir Robert Morant, Deputy Chairman of the Joint Insurance Commissions, and he reminded me of numerous instances of officials who had left their Departments under similar circumstances.

I was assured that the term "on loan" referred only to the salary question, and that the Insurance Commission would have no claim whatever on my services, after I definitely accepted the post of Commandant, W.R.A.F., at the end of my month's look round, and that in my case this point was emphasised by the fact that I was not a Civil Servant and, therefore, my services could not be loaned in the ordinary sense of the word.

The question of salary was also discussed. As I had not taken any leave, excepting a few days since the beginning of the war, I was assured that I was fully entitled to my salary until the end of the year. The pay of the Commandant, W.R.A.F., was half the amount of the salary I was receiving as an Insurance Commissioner. As I did not wish during my service as Commandant, W.R.A.F., to receive higher pay than the heads of the Q.M.A.A.C. and the W.R.N.S. I decided to refund the excess sum at the end of the year, which date, for accounting reasons, I was informed would be the most convenient. In view, however, of my summary dismissal from the post of Commandant and from the W.R.A.F., which made it impossible to continue in the Public Service, I refunded the whole of the pay received by me, dating from the time when on the completion of my month's look round, I accepted the post of Commandant, W.R.A.F., and severed my connection with the Insurance Commission.

CHAPTER XXVII.

An Amazing Attack.

Up to the moment of my cross-examination by the Counsel for the Air Ministry, I was quite in the dark as to the details of the accusations which would be brought against me.

It never occurred to me that during the Inquiry the Air Ministry would endeavour to discredit me in the eyes of the public by representing me to be a woman of violent and irresponsible disposition, without any experience of administration. This attitude is the more inexplicable when it is remembered that up to the time when General Brancker appeared on the scene, his predecessor—General Paine—had assured me that my work gave every satisfaction, and my resignation had been refused on those grounds.

During my cross-examination, the Counsel for the Air Ministry gave up their attempt to prove me to be incompetent and inexperienced. They were thus thrown back on the charge of "gross unpopularity." Many unprejudiced men and women who were present in Court, and heard the Attorney-General and Mr. Rigby Swift must have felt that the small and trivial accusations, based on back-stair gossip, which were brought against me by the Air Ministry, were somewhat unworthy of a Government Department.

Some of those who heard this bitter attack may have been reminded of the words of the Judge and all-round sportsman, the late Sir Henry Hawkins, when, on reproving the Crown Counsel in a famous case he remarked: "I hate to see animus—Counsel for the Crown should be Ministers of Justice, and not partisan advocates bent on winning the game."

In support of the charge that I was impossible to work with, witnesses were produced, who, though on oath, were prepared to state that I was a violent and ill-disposed woman, so cruel and insulting to my subordinates, that life in the office was unbearable

and resignation the only means of escape. I listened in amazement to the vivid description given by the Treasury Counsel (Mr. Rigby Swift), Mrs. Beatty, and Miss Pratt of stormy scenes, and of conversations in which I was alleged to have made the most insulting remarks, and to have been guilty of vulgarisms worthy only of an uneducated and petty mind.

As one who at any rate had been regarded up to date as a reasonable woman whose veracity could be relied on, who—to quote from a letter I received from a senior colleague in another Government Department—was "held by those who knew you to be the soul and breath of honour," it is difficult to describe the feeling of bewilderment with which I tried to face the new situation which confronted me. Possibly only Alice-in-Wonderland might sympathise with my position, closely akin to hers when she stepped through the looking-glass and found herself in a world where everything was reversed and distorted.

Owing to the accusations of Mrs. Beatty, Miss Pratt, and Miss Andrew, it appeared that I was suddenly transformed into an unreliable and unscrupulous character, capable of every form of injustice, and to quote Lord Curzon's statement in the House of Lords, December 15th, 1919, **"a proof of the length to which recklessness and malice were allowed to go."**

Distasteful as it is to have to refer to personal matters, the unjust accusations brought against me, and believed by their Lordships, force me to do so in order that the true facts may be known.

If, as was alleged, I was impossible to work with, the question may well be asked why a person, described by these witnesses as so eminently unsuitable, should have been invited by the Board of Agriculture, the Ministry of Munitions, and the Ministry of Food, to join those Departments a short time before being appointed Commandant, W.R.A.F.

When I was approached in the matter, I was informed by the Departments in question, that my services

were desired on the ground that I had the reputation of helping to work the organisation of large staffs on a smooth and friendly footing. My colleagues and the Staff of the Insurance Commission, where I was a Commissioner for nearly six and a half years in charge of an important branch, had treated me with the fullest confidence. The Joint Statutory Committee dealing with the Treatment, Training, and Employment of Discharged Disabled Ex-Service Men, of which I had been a member for eighteen months before joining the W.R.A.F., had expressed through the Chairman in unmistakable terms, its appreciation of my efforts to facilitate the work during a very trying period. I have received several hundreds of letters from colleagues and fellow workers indignantly protesting against the allegation that I was difficult to work with.

It is not unlikely that certain people, without prejudice or favour, may ask themselves whether it was possible and probable that such a rapid change and deterioration of character and habits could have taken place after only a few weeks' work in the Air Ministry.

As my alleged unfitness for public work has been established by their Lordships' verdict, my reputation for just and honourable dealing discredited, and my career ruined on the sole word of these witnesses, most of whom admitted that they had formed their opinions at the end of a few days' acquaintance, I have set out some of the evidence bearing on these points in detail so that my readers may judge for themselves.

My Counsel questioned each of my witnesses closely as to the ill-bred insolence which during the course of my cross-examination it transpired for the first time that the Air Ministry was bringing forward as a serious charge to account for my dismissal.

One witness (Capt. J. P. Cherry) remarked to me and to others at the conclusion of his evidence: "At any rate, I was determined to show that you were a hustler, and that there was no truth in the idea that you hung up the work and did not get a move on." This passing

remark would be too trivial to refer to were it not that their Lordships, when deciding, to quote their words in the Report, that I was "One not at all likely to get the best out of those with whom she had to work, or over whom she had authority," point to the fact as an example of this, that "of Miss Douglas-Pennant's own witnesses, one, Captain Cherry, describes her 'as a great hustler.'"

Several witnesses were called on my behalf, and many more would have been willing to come forward if we had known at the time that the Air Ministry would seriously allege that I was a person of insolent and violent disposition. Unfortunately, my case was concluded before the Air Ministry witnesses had given their evidence in support of their allegations that I was "not a lady and was unsuitable for the post."

Mrs. Buckley Fosbrooke, an Officer at W.R.A.F. Headquarters, appointed on the clerical staff before I became Commandant, said she had seen me constantly from the time of my arrival until my dismissal, and that I had always treated her "most kindly, very nicely indeed," and that she had never known me to be rude on the telephone as alleged.

Mrs. Atkin, Hostel Administrator, W.R.A.F., was equally emphatic. She declared that she had always found me easy to work with, and had never heard me rude to anybody. Questioned by my Counsel regarding the beautiful gift which she and the rest of my staff at Headquarters had given me as a memento after my dismissal, Mrs. Atkin stated that she and the other officers had all signed an appreciation (sent with their gift) addressed

> **"To 'Our Commandant,' as a slight token of loyalty and appreciation of her sympathetic consideration, from the Officers working at W.R.A.F. Headquarters."**

Lieut.-Colonel G. Brierley, C.M.G., D.S.O. (Head of the Disciplinary Branch, Air Ministry), Dr. Drury Pennington, M.B., B.S. (late Major, R.A.F.), Captain W. E. Stone (Barrister, Disciplinary Branch, Air Ministry), Captain N. Hedges, R.A.F. (Lecturer in charge of the classes at the Probationary Officers' Training Depot), and

Mr. W. G. Hayward (First-class Clerk and Establishment Officer, attached to W.R.A.F. Headquarters), all spoke emphatically in my favour. These Officers, with whom I was in constant touch in the course of our daily duties, gave most cordial testimony to what they alleged was the unfailing courtesy I invariably showed to them and to all others with whom, to their knowledge, I came in contact. They also testified as to my capabilities.

"Mr. Buchanan: Did you co-operate successfully with her in the business?

"Colonel Brierley: Yes. . . . . She was mad keen to get the work done, and so was I."

.....

"Mr. Buchanan: Did you try to put the matter [Medical Scheme] on practical lines in consultation with Miss Douglas-Pennant, and did you during the course of the preparation of that scheme have many opportunities of forming a judgment of Miss Douglas-Pennant's capabilities and manner?

"Dr. Pennington: As to her capabilities she seemed to be fully alive to all the problems involved, and to take an active interest in the whole matter. As far as manners were concerned, I certainly had nothing to complain of—far from it.

"Mr. Buchanan: Did you co-operate successfully with her?

"Dr. Pennington: Perfectly.

"Mr. Buchanan: Did you on any occasion during that time ever hear her rude to anyone else, or on any occasion would you take exception to her manner to other people?

"Dr. Pennington: Not at all."

.....

"Mr. Buchanan: During that time did she, in your opinion, make every effort, and did she in fact co-operate successfully with you?

"Captain Stone: Very successfully.

"Mr. Buchanan: What opinion did you form of her administrative ability for organisation?

"Captain Stone: Excellent in every way."

.....

"Mr. Buchanan: Did you always find her tactful and easy to work with?

"Captain Hedges: Absolutely.

"Mr. Buchanan: Was she ever rude to you, or did you ever hear her rude to anybody else?

"Captain Hedges: Never."

.....

"Mr. Buchanan: When Miss Douglas-Pennant was leaving did you go and say good-bye to her, and was Colonel Powell present at the same time?

"Capt. Cherry: Yes.

"Mr. Buchanan: Did you express your sorrow at Miss Douglas-Pennant's departure, and did Colonel Powell make some remark?

"Capt. Cherry: Yes, I said 'I am awfully sorry Miss Douglas-Pennant, that you are going. It seems a pity after you have been getting everything in more or less workmanlike shape . . .' Colonel Powell chimed in and said, 'If I had been here two or three months earlier, Cherry, this thing would not have happened.'

"Mr. Buchanan: During the time that you were there did you find Miss Douglas-Pennant difficult or easy to work with?

"Capt. Cherry: I thought she was a great hustler.

Incidentally, Mr. Hayward, in the course of his evidence, at once refuted and supplied an explanation of the accusation brought against me by others, that "I was rude on the telephone." The passage is so significant that I quote it—

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: Is there any truth in the suggestion at all events during the period to which you can speak, that Miss Douglas-Pennant was rude on the 'phone?

"Mr. Hayward: Absolutely none.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: Or to visitors?

"Mr. Hayward: Certainly not.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: Or to you?

"Mr. Hayward: Certainly not to me.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: Or to the rest of the staff?

"Mr. Hayward: No.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: Did you ever see anything in that lady's behaviour which indicated that she was not fit to control a staff or to interview people in connection with office matters?

"Mr. Hayward: No.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: When Miss Douglas-Pennant was not there, and a telephone call came through for her, who would answer the call?

"Mr. Hayward: The Private Secretary, the Deputy, or the Assistant Commandant acting during Miss Pennant's absence.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: And among those officers would there be Mrs. Andrews and Miss Andrew?

"Mr. Hayward: Mrs. Andrews was there acting as Deputy Commandant and Miss Andrew as Assistant Commandant.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: Did they sometimes answer Miss Pennant's calls in Miss Pennant's absence?

"Mr. Hayward: Yes, frequently.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: Now I want to ask you about Miss Andrew. Was Miss Andrew consistently polite on the telephone?

"Mr. Hayward: Oh no, she was certainly not polite.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: What did you notice? What makes you say that?

"Mr. Hayward: I should say that Miss Andrew on the 'phone was curt, abrupt.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: Do you remember anything she said?

"Mr. Hayward: No, I do know that I had constant complaints from the registry below that Miss Andrew was rude to them on the 'phone.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: And from what you heard of Miss Andrew on the 'phone do you agree or disagree with that?

"Mr. Hayward: I certainly agree with that."

During my cross-examination the Counsel for the Air Ministry (Mr. Rigby Swift) asked me the following questions regarding Mrs. Beatty:—

"Mr. Rigby Swift: Now let me take the case of Mrs. Beatty. From the time you went there until you had some trouble about the files which you told my Lords about [*see* pages 48, 49], did you ever have any cross words with Mrs. Beatty?

"Miss Douglas-Pennant: Never, but I noticed that Mrs. Beatty took exception to two points.

"Mr. Rigby Swift: Yes?

"Miss Douglas-Pennant: I had to draw her attention, as well as the attention of the other officers, and I may say I did so in the friendliest way, to the fact that they must not write letters and sign them on policy, or letters to members of Parliament and others, without consulting me, or whoever was Commandant I put it to them that if any question was raised I wanted to feel that I could defend them with my last breath, those were the words I used, that I was the person who would defend the action,

and, therefore, I must know when they wrote letters on policy, etc. I saw that Mrs. Beatty took exception to that.

"Earl of Kintore: Write letters to whom on policy?

"Miss Douglas-Pennant: Letters to other Government Departments, and also to M.P.'s and others. I also had had to question them as to how certain ladies had passed through the Selection Board. I will not mention the names of the ladies, but there were two who struck me as being unsuitable to have been passed through the Board, and I asked the officers how it had happened that they had passed them. They then told me perfectly frankly that they were in the custom of passing people if they brought a letter from someone in the Air Ministry—I understood high quarters. One of the ladies had brought a letter from someone at Downing Street. I said that my strong opinion was that as long as I was Commandant at any rate, we must not be biased in any way by any outside influence. That it was our duty as a Selection Board to give our candid and honest opinion on the merits of the case without any sort of influence, and I saw that Mrs. Beatty did take exception to that.

"Earl of Denbigh: When was that?

"Miss Douglas-Pennant: I should think about a week before she resigned—possibly ten days. I cannot remember the exact date.

"Earl of Denbigh: After you had been there two or three weeks?

"Miss Douglas-Pennant: Yes, but there was no sort of friction over it.

"Mr. Rigby Swift: With those two exceptions you say you had no trouble whatever with Mrs. Beatty?

"Miss Douglas-Pennant: I was not aware of any trouble up to that time. Later on I did find that she had not played the game."

Mrs. Beatty was brought forward by the Air Ministry as one of the witnesses against me. In the course of her evidence she asserted that she formed a very unfavourable opinion of my "capacities" within a fortnight of the date when I first came to the office—for my month's look round—though she had to acknowledge that during a week of that fortnight I was away on tour in the country and she did not come in contact with me at all.

When cross-examined by Mr. Stuart Bevan some very important information as to her own antecedents was

elicited from her. It transpired that early in the War she and several others resigned from a Voluntary Corps—"The Women's Volunteer Reserve," in which she held the rank of "Captain"—as suddenly and with as little reason, in fact under almost precisely similar circumstances as those under which she resigned from the W.R.A.F., to quote her own words—

"I am afraid history has repeated itself."

At first, Mrs. Beatty professed not to understand my Counsel's questions on this point. She said that she did not "remember" the details of her previous resignation, "It is such ancient history I have really rather forgotten it." My Counsel, however, reminded her that this affair had taken place as recently as June, 1915. It was only after my Counsel (Mr. Stuart Bevan) had refreshed her memory by reading the Report made by Lady Londonderry (then Colonel-in-Chief of the Women's Volunteer Reserve) on the occasion in question, that Mrs. Beatty was forced to acknowledge the facts, which, fully stated in that Report, were as follows :—

Six Officers of the W.V.R., of which Mrs. ("Captain") Beatty was one, were summoned to H.Q. by their Commanding Officer and there questioned as to alleged indiscipline. The Commanding Officer expressed dissatisfaction with "Captain" Beatty's replies, whereupon the latter promptly and verbally "resigned." Her example was immediately followed by the others, and these six Officers then made a serious complaint against their Commanding Officer, demanding an investigation which was granted. As a result it was found that they could not substantiate their charges. The Finding of the investigation resulted in the six Officers being censured for the manner in which their resignations were handed in, and for the reasons they gave to justify their action. To quote from the Finding—"*These resignations, handed in in such a manner and for the reasons alleged were in themselves a serious act of indiscipline, and the evidence shows these officers were ready to take offence on comparatively trivial provocation, and that their conduct was too little inspired by a spirit of esprit-de-corps.*"

The following is an extract from Mrs. Beatty's replies when under cross-examination by my Counsel:—

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: You were one of the Officers summoned?

"Mrs. Beatty: I believe so.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: Have you any doubt?

"Mrs. Beatty: I really do not remember very much about it.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: Are you able to tell my Lords whether in 1915, you were summoned to the Commanding Officer and questioned as to alleged indiscipline?

"Mrs. Beatty: I probably was.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: I want to test the answer, if you please, because one is testing your recollection in other matters in this case. Can you answer definitely 'Yes' or 'No'? Whether in 1915 the Commanding Officer summoned you with other people to come to her and complained of want of discipline—has it gone from your memory?

"Mrs. Beatty: I am trying to think.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: Take every opportunity.

"Mrs. Beatty: As far as I remember that is so.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: There is no doubt about it.

"Mrs. Beatty: I think so.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: You know it quite well.

"Mrs. Beatty: I do not really remember very much. A lot has happened since then.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: Let me see if you remember this—'She, that is the Commanding Officer, expressed plainly her dissatisfaction with the replies of Captain Beatty.' Do you remember that?

"Mrs. Beatty: Yes, I think I do.

.....

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: **You of the six first expressed your intention to resign,** and the others immediately followed?

"Mrs. Beatty: Yes. **I am afraid history has repeated itself.**

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: Yes, has it not, singularly."

Mrs. Beatty was also compelled to acknowledge what she at first denied—*i.e.*, that though I was her superior officer she had criticised and expressed adverse opinions regarding me, not only to several other officers but even in the presence of the rank and file.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: Then I may take it that your view was that she was not a lady. She did not behave like one?

"Mrs. Beatty: She did not behave like one.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: So you might very well have said it.

"Mrs. Beatty: Possibly.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: Did you ever express that view to anybody else?

"Mrs. Beatty: No.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: Not in your discussion with Miss Andrew or Miss Pratt?

"Mrs. Beatty: I did not discuss the Commandant with Miss Pratt. She was my superior officer. I could not have done it.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: You are quite right, one must be very particular about these things. At Portland Place were there two girl clerks present at this interview, when Captain Hedges said you said that Miss Douglas-Pennant was not a lady?

"Mrs. Beatty: I really do not remember.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: He said that there were.

"Mrs. Beatty: Well, I do not deny it, but I do not remember about it."

Captain Hedges, on the other hand, declared in his evidence that Mrs. Beatty had spoken very disrespectfully of me before her Junior (Mrs. Unwin) and two members of the rank and file at the Probationary Officers' Training School.

"Mr. Buchanan: Do you remember an occasion on which Mrs. Beatty came down to the School at Portland Place?

"Captain Hedges: I do.

"Mr. Buchanan: I am referring to an occasion on which Mrs. Beatty spoke of Miss Douglas-Pennant?

"Captain Hedges: Yes.

"Mr. Buchanan: **In what manner did Mrs. Beatty speak of Miss Douglas-Pennant?**

"Captain Hedges: **In a very disrespectful manner.**

"Mr. Buchanan: To whom did she say this?

"Captain Hedges: To Mrs. Unwin.

"Mr. Buchanan: **Was there anyone else present in the room?**

"Captain Hedges: **Yes, two girl clerks.**

"Mr. Buchanan: **Subordinate officials to Mrs. Unwin?**

"Captain Hedges: **Yes, just the same as privates in the Army, two girl clerks.**

"Mr. Buchanan: **I need hardly ask you as you have been in the Army that your opinion of such conduct was—that it was highly subversive of all discipline?**

"Captain Hedges: **Yes.**"

Mrs. Beatty also denied that she had criticised me to Dame K. Furse, or written or spoken to Mr. Tyson Wilson concerning me. She declared that she "did not even know his name," although Mr. Tyson Wilson had stated that he had received several letters, including one from Mrs. Beatty, and also that he had seen Mrs. Beatty at the House of Commons. Mrs. Beatty's Counsel (Mr. Evans Jackson) said, however, that he did not intend to call Mr. Tyson Wilson, who was in Court, to clear up this point.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: When did you first express any view at all about Miss Douglas-Pennant to Dame K. Furse?

"Mrs. Beatty: I think it must have been on the 28th June.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: Now, Mrs. Beatty, think.

"Mrs. Beatty: I am.

.....

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: Did you tell Dame K. Furse on the 28th when you went to see her?

"Mrs. Beatty: On the 28th I think I told her that Miss Douglas-Pennant was extremely hard to get on with.

. . . . . .

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: Did you put her in possession of your opinion?

"Mrs. Beatty: On the 28th, no.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: At any time?

"Mrs. Beatty: On the 1st July I told her after I had given in my letter of resignation.

. . . . . .

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: All you ladies seemed to be agreed that though you had been nursing the idea of resigning for longer or shorter periods, it was not until the 30th that any of the three said to the other that she was going to resign.

"Mrs. Beatty: The 29th.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: The 29th, the Saturday, that is right, is it not?

"Mrs. Beatty: Yes.

" Mr. Stuart Bevan : **And you started it?**

" Mrs. Beatty : **I did.**

" Mr. Stuart Bevan : **Just as you started it with the Lady Londonderry's Corps—you were the first?**

" Mrs. Beatty : **Yes.**

.....

" Mr. Stuart Bevan : What led you to do so 'was the interview you had with Miss Douglas-Pennant on that morning ?

" Mrs. Beatty : Yes.

" Mr. Stuart Bevan : What you told us about that was she told you that you were a junior officer and must only sign routine letters ?

" Mrs. Beatty : Yes.

" Mr. Stuart Bevan : Was it because she said that that you made up your mind to resign ?

" Mrs. Beatty : That was the culminating point, yes.

.....

" Mr. Stuart Bevan : Had you indicated to any single soul up to that date that you were contemplating resigning ?

" Mrs. Beatty : On the evening of the 28th I had to Dame Katherine.

.....

" Mr. Stuart Bevan : Not Miss Andrew ?

" Mrs. Beatty : No.

" Mr. Stuart Bevan : Nor Miss Pratt ?

" Mrs. Beatty : No.

" Mr. Stuart Bevan : Nobody at all ?

" Mrs. Beatty : Nobody at all.

" Mr. Stuart Bevan : You had acted on your own ?

" Mrs. Beatty : Absolutely.

" Mr. Stuart Bevan : But from that moment, the 29th, when you forestalled their statement that they were going to resign by saying you were going to resign yourself you acted in conjunction with them, did you not ?

" Mrs. Beatty : I do not know what you mean by 'in conjunction.'

" Mr. Stuart Bevan : You see you invited them to come and see you the next day ?

" Mrs. Beatty : Yes, I was the only one with a home of my own.

" Mr. Stuart Bevan : I congratulate you, but I do not know whether that is a sufficient reason. However, they came to see you.

" Mrs. Beatty : Yes, at my invitation.

" Mr. Stuart Bevan : Never mind the reason. The object of their coming was to discuss the line of action and how these resignations should proceed.

" Mrs. Beatty : I do not think it was entirely.

.....

" Mr. Stuart Bevan : Were you to discuss it with them in order to see whether you could change your own mind when you had not consulted them before, according to what you told us ?

" Mrs. Beatty : Well, I thought I was going out of it singly. When I found that they were of the same mind **I realised that if three of us went the difficulties, of course, would increase.**

" Mr. Stuart Bevan : **That did not prevent you?**

" Mrs. Beatty : **No.**

.....

" Mr. Stuart Bevan : Now, with regard to Mr. Tyson Wilson did you know that Mr. Tyson Wilson had asked a question in the House of Commons ?

" Mrs. Beatty : Not till after he had asked it.

" Mr. Stuart Bevan : You knew it then ? Did you know he was going to ask it ?

" Mrs. Beatty : No.

" Mr. Stuart Bevan : Had not Miss Pratt told you ?

" Mrs. Beatty : No.

" Mr. Stuart Bevan : Did Mr. Tyson Wilson ever have a letter from you ?

" Mrs. Beatty : As far as I know, no.

" Mr. Stuart Bevan : Come, Mrs. Beatty, that is a thing you can be quite definite about. Did you ever write to Mr. Tyson Wilson ?

" Mrs. Beatty : No, I did not.

" Mr. Stuart Bevan : Why did you say as far as you can remember ?

" Mrs. Beatty : Because, if you will give me permission to explain, I was asked to send a copy of my resignation in order that a Member of Parliament might look into it—I do not know who he was—and I sent a copy.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: To whom?

"Mrs Beatty: I think it was to Miss Taylor."

NOTE.—Miss Taylor was one of the five ladies to whom I was unable to give the high posts promised them by Colonel Bersey and Miss Pratt before I became Commandant. Mrs. Beatty, in her evidence, admitted that Miss Taylor had actually been appointed. Colonel Bersey, on the other hand, denied this in his evidence, and assured the Court that he had never seen nor heard of four out of the five ladies (*see* pages 36-47).

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: Are you sure?

"Mrs. Beatty: Yes.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: Was it not to Mr. Tyson Wilson?

"Mrs. Beatty: No, I did not even know his name.

.....

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: Do you mean to say you never saw him?

"Mrs. Beatty: No, not till the 23rd October, 1919.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: During these proceedings?

"Mrs. Beatty: Exactly.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: Before then you never saw him?

"Mrs. Beatty: No.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: I think you said you were going to call him as a witness to prove it?

"Mrs. Beatty: I said he was willing to appear and say that he had not seen me.

"Mr. Evans Jackson [Mrs. Beatty's Counsel]: I am not calling him.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: Do you know that Mr. Tyson Wilson has stated that he received several letters with regard to these resignations, some of them anonymous and some not? One letter was from Mrs. Beatty and one from Mrs. or Miss Taylor. He also received visits from Mrs. Beatty and Miss Pratt, who on one occasion at any rate saw him together."

The Counsel for the Air Ministry objected to this question, and the Chairman (Lord Wrenbury) ruled that Mr. Stuart Bevan was exceeding the limits.

The importance of much of the evidence of Mrs. Beatty and Miss Andrew lies in the proof it affords that they acted in collusion in the matter and the manner of their resignations; that Miss Andrew at any rate thought that "the resignation of three senior officers might entail

an Inquiry" (*see* page 319), and that after those resignations, which General Sir Godfrey Paine described as "mutiny," had been accepted they immediately entered on a campaign of complaint against me, with the object of bringing about my resignation or removal. It will be seen that their Lordships, however, take the view that there was no Intrigue (*see* page 335) or attempt to bring about my dismissal by improper means.

Miss Andrew admitted in her evidence that she had telephoned to Lord Weir to make an appointment with him. This he allowed in defiance of Regulations.

"Mr. Branson [Counsel for the Air Ministry]: We know that on the 1st July you tendered your resignation to Miss Pennant.

"Miss Andrew: Yes.

"Mr. Branson: When did the idea of resigning come into your mind?

"Miss Andrew: The idea of resigning had been in my mind for some time, but I decided definitely to resign on the Saturday morning before the 1st July, the 29th of June.

"Mr. Branson: Did you go to the office on the Saturday morning, the 29th June?

"Miss Andrew: Yes.

"Mr. Branson: And did you on that morning have a conversation with Mrs. Beatty?

"Miss Andrew: Yes.

"Mr. Branson: Will you tell the Committee what happened?

"Miss Andrew: When I arrived at the office on the Saturday morning, shortly after I entered my room (Mrs. Beatty and I shared the same room), Mrs. Beatty came out from an interview with the Commandant and told me she was going to resign. That clinched the matter as far as I was concerned. I had been thinking of resigning for some time, and I quite made up my mind then that that was the time to do it.

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* NOTE.—This statement regarding Mrs. Beatty's alleged interview with me is untrue, as is also Miss Andrew's statement that Miss Pratt was busy in the office on Saturday, June 29th. As a matter of fact, Saturday, June 29th, was the day when all the Women's Corps and War workers marched to Buckingham Palace, on the occasion of their Majesties' Silver Wedding. I was absent from the office on duty nearly the whole morning, and only saw Miss Pratt and Mrs. Beatty for a moment to tell them that I had been to Buckingham Palace to explain to the Queen's Lady-in-Waiting how greatly disappointed the W.R.A.F. were that the Air Ministry had decided that they could not allow them to march past owing to the lack of uniforms. I gave all the officers and rank and file leave until the following Monday, July 1st, and no one was in the office with the exception of myself from 12.30, June 29th, until the following Monday, July 1st, when the resignations were handed in although the officers had all parted from me on the previous Saturday, on what I believed to be the friendliest terms.

"Mr. Branson: Did you then tell Mrs. Beatty that you also were going to resign?

"Miss Andrew: I did.

"Mr. Branson: Did you then go and see Miss Pratt?

"Miss Andrew: I met Miss Pratt at lunch time on that day and asked Miss Pratt if I might see her in the afternoon of that same day.

"Mr. Branson: Did you see her on that day and discuss the matter?

"Miss Andrew: I did not discuss it fully on that day. I just told her I had made up my mind to resign. It was rather difficult to talk in her office. She was very busy. I arranged to meet her on the following Sunday at Mrs. Beatty's house, on Sunday afternoon. Mrs. Beatty had invited me to go there to tea."

"Mr. Branson: **Did you go to Mrs. Beatty's on the 30th?**

"Miss Andrew: **I did.**

"Mr. Branson: **Who was there?**

"Miss Andrew: **Mrs. Beatty, Miss Bear** [a Probationary Officer] **who was living with Mrs. Beatty at that time, Miss Taylor, Mrs. Parry** [General Livingston's sister], **and Miss Pratt.**

"Mr. Branson: **On the 12th July you went to see Lord Weir?**

"Miss Andrew: **Yes, on or about that date. I telephoned and asked Lord Weir if he would see me.**

"Mr. Branson: Was that to urge him to accept your resignation?

"Miss Andrew: It was."

Cross-examined by my Counsel, Miss Andrew replied as follows:—

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: We know that Miss Douglas-Pennant joined the W.R.A.F. on the 13th?

"Miss Andrew: Yes.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: So you had had a week's experience of Miss Douglas-Pennant in the office?

"Miss Andrew: Well, hardly, because I had been on tour in between with Miss Taylor in the South-Eastern Area.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: You had seen something of her [Miss Douglas-Pennant]?

"Miss Andrew: I saw her on the day before I went out on the tour and on the evening of my return.

(NOTE.—A week after I came on a month's "look-round." Miss Andrew returned from a tour with Miss Taylor.

I took Miss Andrew off two days later with Major Elwell on my first tour of inspection which lasted from May 20th till May 27th. I saw very little of her during that time as I was constantly engaged on business with the Commanding Officers and W.R.A.F. of the Camps we visited.)

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: I suppose you do not dispute that Miss Douglas-Pennant showed great energy and keenness during this visit to the Camps, and anxiety to become acquainted with the conditions?

"Miss Andrew: I do not dispute that, no.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: And at the end of that tour, at any rate, did you feel any dissatisfaction with your position?

"Miss Andrew: Not with my position, no.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: That brings us to the 27th May.

"Miss Andrew: May I qualify that last remark, my Lord?

"Chairman: Yes, certainly.

"Miss Andrew: I had at the end of that tour become dissatisfied with the position of the W.R.A.F.—not with my position in it, but with the Corps.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: Was it because it was not getting organised as quickly as you wanted it? To take it shortly, were they on general grounds, and not on grounds personal to the Commandant?

"Miss Andrew: On general grounds.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: You said you were not dissatisfied with the Commandant. How is it that three days later you began to think of resigning? What happened in those three days?

"Miss Andrew: To put it quite frankly, during the tour it seemed to me that Miss Pennant did not grasp the needs of the Women's Royal Air Force. She had not grasped what was essential.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: Do you appreciate that a minute ago you told me that during the tour you were dissatisfied with the general progress of things, and not on any grounds personal to Miss Douglas-Pennant. Having given us that answer, do you now want to substitute this—that during that tour you were dissatisfied with Miss Douglas-Pennant because she was not in a position to grasp the situation.

"Miss Andrew: I do not appreciate your question. May I have it more shortly?

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: Do you suggest that during that tour you had formed an unfavourable opinion of Miss Douglas-Pennant's capacity?

"Miss Andrew: I do.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: In those seven short days when Major Elwell was there?

"Miss Andrew: A very long seven days. We started at 8 o'clock in the morning.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: They may have been long days, but a short period of seven days when Major Elwell was there.

"Miss Andrew: Yes.

.....

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: You came to a conclusion on the 29th,?

"Miss Andrew: I did.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: You shared Mrs. Beatty's room?

"Miss Andrew: I did.

.....

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: And you never discussed it?

"Miss Andrew: The question of resignation, never.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: Then it was mere coincidence that you, having made up your mind on the 29th, Mrs. Beatty on the 30th told you that she had done the same?

"Miss Andrew: I think I have already informed you that on the morning of the 29th Mrs. Beatty informed me she was going to resign.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: That was the day you had made up your mind?

"Miss Andrew: Yes.

.....

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: May I take it that you had not made up your mind definitely until Mrs. Beatty told you she was going to resign?

"Miss Andrew: I had not made up my mind about the date, no.

.....

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: **So does it come to this as between you and Mrs. Beatty, Mrs. Beatty was the first to suggest her resignation, and you said, 'I will resign too'?**

"Miss Andrew: **Practically, yes.**

.....

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: **The next day you all went to Mrs. Beatty . . . Miss Pratt being invited?**

"Miss Andrew: **Yes.**

. . . . . .

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: But you did not find out that Miss Pratt was going to resign until the Sunday at Mrs. Beatty's?

"Miss Andrew: I knew that Miss Pratt was going to resign on Saturday.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: Whom did you hear that from?

"Miss Andrew: After I resigned Mrs. Beatty told me.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: Did you say, 'If we all go the Air Council will give us an Inquiry'?

"Miss Andrew: No.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: Did you ever say that to any of these ladies—Mrs. Beatty, or Mrs. Parry, or Miss Pratt?

"Miss Andrew: I do not know. **When I resigned I thought the resignations of three senior officers might entail an Inquiry. I certainly thought so. . . .**

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: **Was one matter that you thought ought to be made public that Miss Douglas-Pennant was not appointing women to the posts they deserved?**

"Miss Andrew: That Miss Douglas-Pennant was not appointing senior officers when she had a pool of officers to call upon.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: Among them being Mrs. Livingston-Parry and Miss Taylor? [*See* pages 37-47, 83].

"Miss Andrew: Yes.

. . . . . .

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: **Does it come to this, that you and Miss Douglas-Pennant took very different views as to the suitability of many people for posts in the W.R.A.F.?**

"Miss Andrew: **I did not discuss suitability with Miss Douglas-Pennant. . . . . I considered a number of people were suitable for posts.**

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: And Miss Douglas-Pennant happened to think they were not?

"Miss Andrew: It seemed so." [*See* pages 82-87].

Certain of Miss Pratt's statements during the Inquiry were so far-fetched and so preposterous that I can only deny them absolutely, and leave it to reasonable people

to decide whether they are probable and ring true. For instance, Miss Pratt declared that after she and the other officers had handed in their resignations I sent for her, and after discussing some small office detail with her, suddenly began to "abuse" her in an indiscriminate manner, and that I "rushed about the room" in an uncontrolled condition, declaring that I was "a lady." Miss Pratt also stated that I had threatened "to get something down on paper against General Livingston," and that I boasted that I had the "whip-hand of him" and "held the winning cards." I never had any occasion to discuss General Livingston with Miss Pratt beyond the fact that I told her that I was sorry that circumstances made it impossible for me to recommend his sister, Mrs. Livingston-Parry, for the high appointment promised her before training by Colonel Bersey and Miss Pratt, and for which I am prepared to show she was unsuited.

As the chief points in Miss Pratt's evidence are referred to in my cross-examination by the Counsel for the Air Ministry (Mr. Rigby Smith), I give the following detailed extract which will show the nature of her accusations and my replies thereto :—

"Mr. Rigby Swift: Who do you suggest Miss Pratt was coerced by?

"Miss Douglas-Pennant: . . . . I am quite convinced that the fact that they all walked out of the office without any warning, any hint, any indication that they were dissatisfied was, to put it plainly, a put-up job in order to discredit me.

"Mr. Rigby Swift: Have you the slightest evidence in the world that anybody ever suggested to Miss Pratt that she should resign in order that you should be got rid of?

"Miss Douglas-Pennant: I have no direct evidence excepting that they all walked into my room at the same moment and handed in their resignations, when we had parted on the friendliest terms on the Saturday previously.

"Mr. Rigby Swift: And on that and on nothing more than that you come here and ask my Lords to say that she was coerced by General Livingston through Colonel Bersey?

"Miss Douglas-Pennant: **I cannot say by whom. I particularly said so.**

"Chairman: Then you cannot know that she was coerced?

"Miss Douglas-Pennant: That is my certain opinion, that, nothing else . . . .

"Chairman: With all deference to you, I do not care what your opinion is. What are the facts?

"Miss Douglas-Pennant: I cannot tell you.

"Chairman: You have no facts to support that opinion, have you?

"Miss Douglas-Pennant: Well, she walked into my room and resigned.

"Chairman: Quite so?

"Miss Douglas-Pennant: That is a fact.

"Chairman: The suggestion is this, as I understand it. There were certain three ladies occupying certain posts, and getting certain salaries, they with a view of displacing Miss Douglas-Pennant combined in resigning in the anticipation that the result would be that she would be dismissed and they would be reinstated.

"Miss Douglas-Pennant: Yes.

"Chairman: That is what you believe?

"Miss Douglas-Pennant: Yes.

"Chairman: Now what is the evidence? That is the next thing.

"Miss Douglas-Pennant: Colonel Bersey told me that they had resigned, and that he was going to resign. As soon as he found out that I was not going, but that their resignations were accepted, he came and told me he had made a mistake and asked me to tell the M.G.P. so [*i.e.*, the Master-General of Personnel, General Paine].

"Mr. Rigby Swift: Did you see Miss Pratt on the morning of the 3rd July.

"Miss Douglas-Pennant: They resigned on the 1st, I think, and I saw her on the evening of 1st July.

"Mr. Rigby Swift: Did you see her again on the morning of the 3rd?

"Miss Douglas-Pennant: I either saw her the next day, which would be the 2nd, or on the 3rd. I think it was the 3rd. She came to ask me for leave.

"Mr. Rigby Swift: Were you very angry?

"Miss Douglas-Pennant: Certainly not.

"Mr. Rigby Swift: Was there a scene?

"Miss Douglas-Pennant: Certainly not.

"Mr. Rigby Swift: Miss Pratt writes on the 3rd July saying: 'I regret I am unable to return temporarily to the office as suggested, but in view of your attitude in the painful interview which took place in your room this morning, it is evident that no useful purpose would be served thereby.' Do you mean to say that nothing happened at that interview which justified it being called a painful interview?

"Miss Douglas-Pennant: Absolutely nothing. Must I explain what I explained yesterday—the detail?

"Chairman: I should certainly like to know.

"Miss Douglas-Pennant: Miss Pratt came and said she wished to go on leave. I said I was very sorry, but in view of Lord Weir's minute—[*i.e.*, that these Officers were to remain at their positions until relieved] . . . .

"Chairman: You said that you could not give leave. That it did not rest with you.

"Miss Douglas-Pennant: Yes.

"Chairman: That was all?

"Miss Douglas-Pennant: She [Miss Pratt] said I had given leave to Miss Taylor, and I explained she was sick, and I would gladly do it for Miss Pratt if I could.

"Chairman: There was nothing painful in all that.

"Miss Douglas-Pennant: Nothing at all. I asked Miss Pratt then to tell me really what was the trouble and why they had felt it necessary to hand me the resignations, and Miss Pratt then used a rather automatic form of words that—'no purpose could be served by any discussion,' and left the room. I may say that I did not receive that letter from Miss Pratt, and that I had no warning whatever that they were not going to return.

"Mr. Rigby Swift: Do you mean you had not received the letter of the 3rd July?

"Miss Douglas-Pennant: Certainly not at that time. It may have come to me on a file long afterwards, but I saw it with great surprise when the White Paper was published.

"Mr. Rigby Swift: Can you imagine anything which caused her if not justified in using the expression 'painful interview'? Was it a painful interview?

"Miss Douglas-Pennant: Nothing in my attitude whatever.

"Chairman: You cannot explain the expression at all?

"Miss Douglas-Pennant: Absolutely not at all.

"Mr. Rigby Swift: I suggest that you sent for her, but it does not matter—she came to your room.

"Miss Douglas-Pennant: She did.

"Mr. Rigby Swift: Were you very angry?

"Miss Douglas-Pennant: Not in the least.

"Mr. Rigby Swift: Did you walk about the room?

"Miss Douglas-Pennant: I was sitting at my writing-table.

"Mr. Rigby Swift: Did you leave your writing-table?

"Miss Douglas-Pennant: I really cannot tell you at this distance. I did not know I was being watched.

"Mr. Rigby Swift: Would it be true to say that you rushed about the room talking to her?

"Miss Douglas-Pennant: I should certainly say it is not my habit to go rushing about a room.

"Chairman: You say you did not?

"Miss Douglas-Pennant: I did not. I may have run to the telephone, or something of that sort.

"Mr. Rigby Swift: Did you think you had been badly treated by these four [*sic* three] ladies resigning?

"Miss Douglas-Pennant: Yes, if you ask me whether I think so, I certainly think I was.

"Mr. Rigby Swift: Did you say so?

"Miss Douglas-Pennant: I cannot tell you whether I used the words 'badly treated' or not, but I certainly said, 'Oh, Miss Pratt, I do not think it has been quite fair not letting me know that you had any reasons for resigning, and then resigning suddenly in a hurry like that and handing me three receipts.'

"Mr. Rigby Swift: Did you say you had been abominably treated by them?

"Miss Douglas-Pennant: I do not think I used the word 'abominably.'

"Mr. Rigby Swift: Did you say you were a lady?

"Miss Douglas-Pennant: I am quite certain I did not. I never knew there was any doubt.

"Mr. Rigby Swift: I daresay not. I am not asking you whether there was any doubt about it. I am asking whether you said to Miss Pratt you were a lady, and that these women were not ladies?

"Miss Douglas-Pennant: I am quite certain I never did.

"Mr. Rigby Swift: Did you say they had apparently never met or had anything to do with a lady before?

"Miss Douglas-Pennant: I am quite certain I never said anything so rude.

"Mr. Rigby Swift: Did you say you were a Douglas-Pennant?

"Miss Douglas-Pennant: I am quite certain I did not. That would be of no interest to Miss Pratt. She knew it also.

"Mr. Rigby Swift: Did you say that your friends should know about this?

"Miss Douglas-Pennant: Certainly not. It is such a painful thing, too, the desertion of women officers in war time that I should try and draw a veil over it.

"Mr. Rigby Swift: Did you say anything about 10, Downing Street?

"Miss Douglas-Pennant: Certainly not.

"Mr. Rigby Swift: I suggest to you that this interview of yours on the 3rd July with Miss Pratt was a most painful interview at which you roundly abused her for what she had done?

"Miss Douglas-Pennant: I deny that entirely.

"Mr. Rigby Swift: And you say, as I understand it, that there is absolutely no ground for her writing the same day saying 'after the painful interview I cannot come back'?

"Miss Douglas-Pennant: I cannot imagine any reasonable woman doing such a thing" [*see* pages 48-61].

As these irrational ravings attributed to me had occurred at interviews without witnesses, or at interviews of which I have no knowledge, I was single-handed against my detractors, and could only state the truth, which was that I had never done, or said, or thought, any of the things of which for the first time I found myself accused.

It is significant that these charges, which were brought against me by a few people who resented my inability to recommend their unsuitable friends for responsible posts, and my determination to place the organisation of the W.R.A.F. on sound and just lines, were of so small and trivial a nature, that to the lay mind, unfamiliar with the intricacies and subtleties of the law, they hardly seemed to outweigh the emphatic evidence to the contrary given by witnesses who were men and women of undoubted standing and experience. It was difficult to believe that these fantastic allegations would be seriously brought forward, backed by the full weight of the legal advisers.

of the Air Ministry to discredit someone who had spent many strenuous years in the public service. It had never occurred to me that it would fall to my lot to have to defend myself against charges of discourtesy and vulgarity of a description of which I hope I am entirely incapable.

Miss Pratt declared further that I had assured her that if I was sent away I would soon be brought back, and that she was to carry on meanwhile. This statement is a serious distortion of the facts, which are as follows :—

When I definitely accepted the post of Commandant on June 16th, 1918, I told Miss Pratt that, as I was giving up my appointment of Insurance Commissioner, I should have to visit Cardiff, to pack and give up the house I had occupied there. As it was impossible for me to leave the work at W.R.A.F. Headquarters during the week, I explained to Miss Pratt that I should have to ask her to be on duty instead of me during the whole of a Sunday, in order to enable me to reach Cardiff by the night train on Saturday, complete my business there, and to return on Sunday night to W.R.A.F. Headquarters. There is no doubt that Miss Pratt thoroughly understood my intentions at the time.

Surely it was the duty of Miss Pratt as Deputy Commandant to have told me that she, Mrs. Beatty, and Miss Andrew were dissatisfied with their work at W.R.A.F. Headquarters, instead of allowing me to believe up to the moment of their sudden resignations that all was going well. I gave Miss Pratt and these officers every opportunity of bringing their difficulties to me. Hardly a day passed without my asking them if I could do anything to help them with their work, and impressing upon them that they must not hesitate to come to consult me at any time. None of them ever gave me the slightest indication that there was any friction. Miss Pratt and Miss Andrew, on the contrary, led me to believe that I had won their confidence (*see* pages 52, 53). I trusted them up to the moment when they left. During the Inquiry I listened in amazement to Miss Pratt's evidence of my alleged violent behaviour, and the words she had used three days before

her sudden resignation (when I gave her a lift home in my taxi) rang in my ear : " I hope that you will never think of resigning in spite of the hard work. I cannot tell you what a relief it is to all of us to have someone keen and sympathetic like you as Commandant."

The evidence in my favour is fully borne out by numerous letters I received from W.R.A.F. Officers at the time of my dismissal, all of whom were previously total strangers to me. The following extracts show that I had every reason to believe that the happiest relations existed between me and my Staff, and that the allegation that I was "grossly unpopular" was untrue :—

"August 29th, 1918.

"I was so overcome at what you told me that I couldn't speak. It's a wicked thing, but only what the Air Board is doing every day—they don't want 'ladies' in the Force.

"Now that you are going I take very little interest in it, and I don't think that I shall stay on. I should like to work under you, if you could possibly find me a job—I would rather do that than anything.

"I wish I could tell you how sorry I am, and how my blood is boiling with rage.

"I should like to say how very sorry I am personally that you have left us. I had looked forward so much to coming back [to H.Q. from an Area] and working under you. Although I was not with you for very long, it was long enough for me to realise how absolutely fair and just you were to everyone under you, and how entirely above any considerations except those of the well-being of the Corps. I feel that I have lost a leader who had my entire loyalty and trust . . . . .

"I did not know until I got back to Mason's Yard that it had ever been suggested that you were personally not popular with your Staff. Apart from its being preposterously untrue, we all felt that it was a distinct reflection on our loyalty. Everyone was very indignant about it . . . . . I know that everyone who ever came in touch with you feels that the Force has lost its real head.

"The news you gave me yesterday was such a horrid blow, that I didn't know what to say. I do feel that your departure was a terrible loss to us all, and I can only thank you very much for all your help and the high ideals you have set before us. It has been the greatest honour and pleasure to work under you, and to feel that

we had a Commandant we could look up to as a fine example of unswerving devotion to duty. With renewed thanks for all your kindness."

.....

Another W.R.A.F. Officer who wished to give evidence, wrote :—

"Miss Douglas-Pennant was invariably businesslike and courteous with all with whom she came in contact, and so absolutely just and fair that one felt secure in her hands."

In his evidence before the House of Lords Enquiry, General Paine, who, with his Staff, had been in constant touch with me during the time I was in the W.R.A.F., made the following statement regarding the sudden resignations of the three W.R.A.F. Officers :—

"Mr. Stuart Bevan : Now, about the same date we know there were the resignations of these three ladies—Mrs. Beatty, Miss Pratt, and Miss Andrew?

"General Paine : Yes.

.....

"Mr. Stuart Bevan : A few days later, did you receive a telephone message from Mrs. Beatty that she wished to see you?

"General Paine : Yes. With regard to these resignations, as far as I remember, Miss Douglas-Pennant came to me and told me that these three women officers had resigned. I asked her about them and, as far as I remember, she said she was sorry they were going. She did not know the reason because she could not get anything definite out of them. I told her that these women were to be told that they were to continue their work until suitable reliefs could be found for them, and, as far as I know, she sent that to them in writing. About a day or two afterwards she told me that two of them had not come back to the office ; the third one I saw, and she went on a tour to Scotland.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan : That was Miss Andrew?

"General Paine : Yes. But two of them had not come back to the office, so I told her to write to them and say that their resignations were accepted, and that they would cease their pay from the date that they resigned, whatever date it was, the 4th or 5th July.

.....

"Mr. Stuart Bevan : About that time did Mrs. Beatty come to see you?

"General Paine : Yes. She telephoned to my Secretary one morning, and said she wanted to see me. Miss Pennant and Colonel Bersey were then in my room discussing various plans for getting

these women Officers, and so on. I told him I would see her at once. She came to the Cecil, and was shown into my room when Miss Douglas-Pennant and Colonel Bersey were there, and I asked her what she wanted, and she said she had come to see me about her resignation and a letter she had written, or was going to send in. I really forget whether she had sent the letter in.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: Yes. She had sent it in on the 1st July.

"General Paine: Anyhow, she had it with her, and I said it was very opportune that she had arrived at that moment as Miss Douglas-Pennant and Colonel Bersey were in the room and we would discuss the letter chapter and verse, and see if there was anything in it she wanted to explain or if she had any grievance, and we went through it there and then.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: Did she put forward her views on the various statements in her letter?

"General Paine: Yes.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: And did Miss Douglas-Pennant answer the views expressed by Mrs. Beatty?

"General Paine: Yes.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: Going through the letter paragraph by paragraph, did you come to this—'I came as Senior Officer of the W.R.N.S. with special knowledge, which I have not been able to use, although a request was made by you [Miss Douglas-Pennant] to the W.R.N.S. that you should be supplied with their scheme of organisation. This information was supplied to you at your request by my Junior in that Department [the W.R.N.S.]. This form of procedure being absolutely out of order from the Service point of view.'

"General Paine: Yes. I remember that quite well.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: Did you ask her what she meant?

"General Paine: Yes, I said I did not know what she was talking about, and she could not explain it. In fact, I told her I thought it was nonsense. I cannot understand it now. I do not know whether anybody else can [*see* pages 53, 65].

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: Did she make any allegation against Miss Pennant on that occasion, other than those that were set out in the letter?

"General Paine: No, I think not. I asked her if she had any allegation or charges to make against Miss Pennant, or Colonel Bersey, or the Department, and, as far as I know, she had none.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: **And did you come to the conclusion in the matter as to whether Mrs. Beatty was right or wrong in her complaint?**

"General Paine: **I came to the conclusion she was absolutely wrong.**

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: And did you act accordingly?

"General Paine: Yes, I told her so.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: **Now we know that these resignations were consequent upon or followed in date Miss Douglas-Pennant's refusal to appoint five ladies to high posts.**

"General Paine: **It was after that.**

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: **Now, had that refusal of Miss Douglas-Pennant your approval or not?**

"General Paine: **Quite. She came to me with a list of five ladies for appointment to various posts in the W.R.A.F. She told me that they were not, in her opinion, sufficiently experienced to be appointed to the higher grades that they had been nominated for, but that she thought they would be very capable officers in time and with experience. I told her to offer them lower appointments, lower grade payment, with a view to their promotion, provided they were sufficiently competent in a short time. I believe she offered them these appointments and the whole five of them refused and resigned.**

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: There are letters in the correspondence, my Lord, showing that these directions of Sir Godfrey's were carried out.

"Earl of Denbigh: That meant leaving these posts of Area Superintendent vacant? If they could fill them and get other women.

"General Paine: We had no experienced women—we could not get women of sufficient experience to appoint direct to Area Superintendents. The idea was that those five should go in a lower position and learn the work in a fortnight, three weeks, or two months; to be promoted to the higher grades, to take over the Areas."

When cross-examined by the Air Ministry Counsel (Mr. Rigby Swift), General Paine gave his views as to the alleged intrigue.

"Mr. Rigby Swift: **I want to ask you first of all generally, during the time that you were there, did you see the slightest sign of any intrigue?**

"General Paine: **Only . . . . .**

"Mr. Rigby Swift: **Could you, first of all, say yes or no?**

"General Paine: **Yes.**

"Mr. Rigby Swift: **You did see signs of it?**

"General Paine: **Yes.**

"Mr. Rigby Swift: **Will you tell me what the sign you saw of an intrigue was?**

"General Paine: **The resignation, first of all, of five women who were offered subordinate posts on the clear understanding that if they did their work satisfactorily they would be promoted to higher posts. They refused to accept those conditions. They went *en bloc*—five of them. To put it vulgarly, they tried to put Miss Douglas-Pennant in the cart—that is one.**

"Mr. Rigby Swift: May we pause for a moment?

"Mr. Hawke [Miss Douglas-Pennant's Counsel]: No, you have asked for the indications of intrigue.

"Mr. Rigby Swift: **May we pause for a moment, and would you be good enough to tell me—do you allege that these five ladies were in an intrigue against Miss Douglas-Pennant?**

"General Paine: I do not know what the definition of 'intrigue' is. **These five women, in my opinion, were concerting together with the hope or the wish that their resignations would not be accepted, and that Miss Douglas-Pennant would go in their place.**

.....

"Mr. Rigby Swift: Is that the only evidence of an intrigue?

"General Paine: No.

"Mr. Rigby Swift: Would you tell me the next item?

"General Paine: A few days afterwards three of the senior staff officers in her office resigned together. Two of their resignations were accepted—the other was not. **These three women, in my opinion, resigned in the hope that she would go and they would be reinstated.** That is only my opinion. I cannot prove it.

"Chairman [Lord Wrenbury]: I should like to know on what that opinion is based? You have simply said that was your opinion. Why did you think so?

"General Paine: Because they could give me no satisfactory reason for going.

"Lord Wrenbury: You asked them, you mean.

"General Paine: I asked one—I saw one. I had quite a long interview with her, and I could not get anything out of it. **I saw Mrs. Beatty afterwards, when she had written the letter. It was quite inexplicable to me why she had gone. There was no particular reason. Miss Pratt I did not see, but I read her statement, and the same thing applies. It was, in my opinion, a form of small mutiny. It would be called mutiny in the Services.**

"Lord Wrenbury: Your opinion is an inference drawn from facts?

"General Paine: Yes. Five of them resigned, and three four days afterwards. **The three Senior Officers resigned, knowing full well that if they went it was practically impossible to get anybody else to take their place at short notice. When told they were to remain at their work until such time that other women Officers could be found to relieve them, instead of doing anything, they walked out. Had they been soldiers or sailors, they would have been court-martialled about it. There is no doubt about that.**

"Mr. Rigby Swift: I understand you to tell my Lord that the reason you think there was an intrigue or conspiracy by these three ladies was that you could get no reason from them for what they had done—is that right?

"General Paine: No. **They gave their reasons, but their reasons, in my opinion, were quite insufficient to justify their action.**

"Mr. Rigby Swift: That is applicable to all these three ladies?

"General Paine: No, to two out of the three. The third I saw [Miss Andrew] . . . . . She did not walk out as the other two did.

"Mr. Rigby Swift: Had she given you any reasons why she wanted to resign?

"General Paine: She made a rambling statement and burst into tears, and I told her to get on with her work.

.....

"Mr. Rigby Swift: Did she tell you that Miss Douglas-Pennant had said that Miss Pratt and Mrs. Beatty had been obstructing her work and intentionally hindering her?

"General Paine: I do not think she told me anything that Miss Douglas-Pennant had said, because if I wanted to know what Miss Douglas-Pennant had said I should have asked her.

"Mr. Hawke [Miss Douglas-Pennant's Counsel]: Surely we should have had some question put to Miss Douglas-Pennant about that?

"Mr. Rigby Swift: How could I have asked Miss Pennant that, my Lord?

"Chairman [Lord Wrenbury]: Do not let us have discussion between Counsel.

To General Paine: Did she [Miss Andrew] tell you that?

"General Paine: No."

In reply to my Counsel (Mr. Hawke), General Paine gave the following evidence:—

"Mr. Hawke: I want to ask you because you probably will be in a position to know the result of what you call the mutiny—those three ladies deserting, or rather, those three ladies leaving without leave—what sort of effect was that likely to have on the work that the Commandant had to do?

"General Paine: **It would hamper her enormously, as it was pointed out to these women at the time. These women leaving the staff would necessarily increase her work very much and hamper her in carrying out her duties.**

"Mr. Hawke: **And in hampering her, of course, hampering the Force?**

"General Paine: **Naturally.**

"Mr. Hawke: **And the interests of the Nation?**

"General Paine: **Exactly.**

"Mr. Hawke: You were in a position to know the extreme difficulty. Did Miss Douglas-Pennant set to work and tackle it?

"General Paine: Yes, she commenced to get another staff or people to relieve them as soon as possible. As I pointed out before, they were told to continue their work, but they refused to do it.

"Mr. Hawke: They disobeyed orders?

"General Paine: Yes, and it certainly did not tend to make things easier.

"Mr. Hawke: You have been asked about your views about Colonel Latimer and General Livingston, and what they did. **I gathered from what you say that you think there was an intrigue against Miss Douglas-Pennant?**

"General Paine: **I think, as I said before, that these women, in resigning, hoped that the Commandant would be relieved, and that they would be reinstated.**

"Mr. Hawke: **In other words, they hoped that she would be got rid of, and that they would return.**

"General Paine: **Yes.**

"Earl of Denbigh: Why do you think they wanted to get rid of her?

"General Paine: I suppose they did not like her. Probably the five of them wanted to get rid of her because they were not going to get the highly paid posts they thought they were going to get.

"Earl of Denbigh: And the others?

"General Paine: I cannot say. I consider it is part of the whole thing.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: Let me ask you this general question. At any time during all this period had you any reason for altering the opinion that you told the Committee you originally held, that Miss Douglas-Pennant was in every way fitted to hold the post of Commandant?

"General Paine: No.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: And during July and August, were you in constant communication with her, and were you well apprised of the general conditions, both in the office and the Air Force generally?

"General Paine: Yes.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: Are you aware of ever having expressed doubt as to whether Miss Douglas-Pennant would pull the Department round?

"General Paine: No, I do not think I ever gave him [Lord Weir] that impression or ever told him so.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: Have you ever yourself observed any want of tact or powers of co-operation in Miss-Douglas-Pennant? Did you observe that Miss Douglas-Pennant put any difficulties in the way?

"General Paine: Oh, no.

.....

"Mr. Hawke: My learned friend suggested to you that Miss Douglas-Pennant complained about people and that she quarrelled with people, and so on. I should like to ask you the question. From what you saw of her during the time she was under your command, did she appear to you to be courteous to her subordinates, and those with whom she came in contact?

"General Paine: Yes. I never saw her with these subordinates or practically never.

"Mr. Hawke: You saw her in communication with other people as you have told me?

"General Paine: Yes.

"Mr. Hawke: And you always found her most courteous?

"General Paine: Yes."

Those who were present in Court or those who have studied the evidence, may feel some difficulty in gauging their Lordships' reasons for accepting without question the word of witnesses whose recollection proved in the course of the evidence they gave to be both inaccurate and unreliable, and certain of whom admitted that they had met together to discuss how to raise an agitation in order to bring about my dismissal. **The attention of the Court was drawn to the original note, in Miss Andrew's writing, of questions drawn up by her and others to be asked in the House of Commons.** Their Lordships were aware that Miss Andrew had visited and corresponded with Lord Weir in defiance of the Regulations (*see* page 247).

Temporary-Colonel Williams had also admitted in his evidence that he had held a meeting of Air Force Officers in his room at H.Q., to protest against the action of Lord Weir and General Paine in superseding Colonel Bersey (*see* page 136).

Yet the Court of Inquiry accepted the evidence of Miss Pratt, Mrs. Beatty, Miss Andrew, Major-General Brancker, and Dame K. Furse against that of the following witnesses: Major-General Sir Godfrey Paine, Lieut.-Colonel G. Brierley, C.M.G., D.S.O., Captain J. P. Cherry, M.C., Mrs. Atkin (Hostel Administrator), Mrs. Buckley Fosbrooke, Captain Norman Hedges, Mr. W. G. Hayward, Dr. Drury Pennington, M.B., and Captain W. E. Stone, and gave as their considered opinion that

I had no justification for alleging that there was an intrigue or that any improper means were used to bring about my dismissal. To quote from the Report :—

"Our conclusion from the whole of the evidence is that each of these three ladies originally made up her mind independently of the others that her position under Miss Douglas-Pennant was to say the least of it, so uncomfortable that she would give up an employment which from a pecuniary point of view she could not lightly abandon rather than suffer the indignities to which she was put. After a time there is no doubt they acted in concert, but we find nothing in the whole story to support the inference that they were acting in concert with a view to compelling or inducing Miss Douglas-Pennant's removal or resignation upon improper grounds. We consider, however, that attention should be drawn to the manner in which these ladies refused to obey orders and carry on until relieved. In Sir Godfrey Paine's words this was 'mutiny' and he expressed his opinion with which we concur that their action in time of war deserves the strongest criticism and increased the difficulties of Miss Douglas-Pennant.

"There is a point here worthy of notice in passing. On the 3rd July, Miss Pratt wrote to Miss Douglas-Pennant a letter in which she said, 'I regret that I am unable to return temporarily to the office as suggested, but in view of your attitude in the painful interview which took place in your room this morning, it is evident that no useful purpose would be served thereby.'

"It is improbable that Miss Pratt would have used the phrase 'painful interview' if nothing took place which could be called painful, yet that is what Miss Douglas-Pennant says. She (Miss Douglas-Pennant) is absolutely unable to explain the expression at all. Miss Pratt tells her story in detail. We believe it.

.....

"In forming an opinion upon the probability or improbability of truth in Miss Douglas-Pennant's suggestion of intrigue, we have found it necessary to consider and estimate Miss Douglas-Pennant's character as evidenced by her demeanour before us and by her evidence as she gave it. By her character, we do not mean the moral character at all. There is no imputation whatever upon that. We mean her disposition. Whether, for instance, she has shown herself to be chivalrous, courteous and considerate, to be one who would rather attribute a good motive than a bad one, to be one who would probably work harmoniously with others.

"Several witnesses have given evidence that she was never rude to them, and so on.

"This we do not at all forget, but it is negative evidence.

.....

"Miss Douglas-Pennant is upon the materials before us shown, we think, to be a woman full of zeal and activity, much impressed with her own importance; very reckless in her imputations upon others (of which we have had grievous examples in this case), and one not at all likely to get the best out of those with whom she had to work or over whom she had authority.

"The story of the intrigue against her has originated in our opinion in her distortion of events, and from her incapacity to see things in their true perspective. This distortion reaches its climax when she accuses Sir Auckland Geddes of being a party to the intrigue. There is no doubt about it. She says so, and the same with Lady Rhondda.

"With Colonel Latimer, Mrs. Beatty, and Miss Andrew, and the other parties whom she accuses of intriguing, we find it unnecessary to deal in detail. The suggestion that they were parties to an intrigue is equally unfounded."

"WE FIND that there was no intrigue—no concerted action—by the parties accused, or any of them to induce or compel Miss Douglas-Pennant's removal or resignation by any improper means."

.....

"This Report and every finding in it have the complete and unanimous assent[1] of every Member of the Committee."

As I am held in consequence of this verdict to be unfit for the Public Service, or for any further share in public life, I may perhaps be permitted to ask why it has been left, after all these long years, for Dame K. Furse and Lady Rhondda, who hardly knew me, to discover suddenly my bad disposition and incompetency on information they accepted from Mrs. Beatty, Miss Andrew, and Miss Pratt.

[1] In view of this *unanimous assent* it seems somewhat inconsistent that a member of the Court (Lord Denbigh) should have written a letter, now in my possession, to a stranger immediately after the publication of the Report, from which the following is an extract:—**"Nobody questions the past 'valuable and honourable public service' of Miss Douglas-Pennant nor her amiability of character."**

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Dame K. Furse's "Inaccurate Recollection."

In view of Dame K. Furse's attitude throughout, I may be permitted to point out that in several instances her evidence proved to be unreliable. It will be remembered (*see* page 73) that she accused me to General Paine of having appointed as an Inspector a senior officer, Mrs. Beckett, who, she (Dame K. Furse) declared had been "dismissed and turned down" by her from the W.R.N.S., but who, on the contrary, had transferred from the W.R.N.S. to the W.R.A.F. with an excellent record. Dame K. Furse was cross-examined by my Counsel regarding this matter.

"Mr. Hawke: When Miss Pennant mentioned Mrs. Beckett, did you say, 'Why, now she is talking of a woman that I dismissed and turned down'?

"Dame K. Furse: I do not remember saying that to Sir Godfrey Paine.

"Mr. Hawke: In his presence?

"Dame K. Furse: In Sir Godfrey Paine's presence I remember laughing when Mrs. Beckett's name was mentioned.

"Mr. Hawke: Do you deny having said that Mrs. Beckett was a lady whom you had dismissed?

"Dame K. Furse: As I explained to Mrs. Beckett in November, when I got a Lawyer's letter, I had not a very definite recollection of what I said.

"Mr. Hawke: The question was whether you deny having said that at that interview.

"Dame K. Furse: What is the exact statement you are asking?

"Mr. Hawke: . . . . In substance you said 'Why, now she (Miss Douglas-Pennant) is talking about a woman I dismissed and turned down.'

"Dame K. Furse: I do not remember that. I remember laughing at the mention of Mrs. Beckett, and I think I implied that we had discharged Mrs. Beckett . . . .

"Mr. Hawke: Did you make any observation to Miss Douglas-Pennant or to anybody at that interview, that Mrs. Beckett had been discharged from the W.R.N.S.?

"Dame K. Furse: **As I say I think I implied that she had been discharged from the W.R.N.S.**

"Mr. Hawke: **Of course, that was not true, was it?**

"Dame K. Furse: **No.**"

Dame K. Furse's statement on oath that she had never said or done anything against me was not borne out by the fact that she had written behind my back to General Paine to complain of me soon after I became Commandant at the time of Mrs. Beatty's resignation (*see* pages 67-68).

These letters, I heard later, were handed by General Paine to my Solicitor during the Inquiry, but were not produced. I was, therefore, unaware of their existence until long afterwards. Neither did the Court know that Dame K. Furse had written this amazing complaint of me to General Paine.

Dame K. Furse, on the other hand, cannot have forgotten that she had written this letter and taken the grave and unprecedented step in the Service of approaching my chief without the knowledge of her chief, the Second Sea Lord, to make such a serious complaint against me, though I hardly knew her. In her evidence, however, she denied any such action :—

"Mr. Rigby Swift: **Is it true that you complained to Sir Godfrey Paine about Miss Douglas-Pennant?**

"Dame K. Furse: **No.**

"Mr. Rigby Swift: I do not know what the untrue statements are alleged to have been, but did you make any untrue statements?

"Dame K. Furse: None that I know of."

Dame K. Furse's statement in her evidence that Mrs. Beatty requested :—

"That her resignation should be further considered"

is untrue. It will be remembered (*see* page 57) that with General Paine's permission I asked Mrs. Beatty, Miss Pratt, and Miss Andrew to withdraw their resignations. It was only when they declined to do so that Lord Weir decided that they should be accepted with the exception of Miss Andrew. Mrs. Beatty saw General Paine on July 9th, 1918. I was present at the

interview, and she never asked him that Lord Weir's decision should be reconsidered. On the contrary, General Paine asked her what ground she had for resigning, and his letter to Dame K. Furse shows that in his opinion she failed to give any adequate explanation (*see* page 68).

Again, Dame K. Furse's statement in her evidence that she only wrote to Lord Weir because she had already seen or written to General Paine is untrue. The real facts are (*see* pages 67-69 and White Paper) that Dame K. Furse wrote to Lord Weir on July 15th, before she wrote to General Paine. Her letter to General Paine (*see* page 67) is dated July 17th, 1918, and it will be seen that in this letter she informs General Paine that she has already communicated with Lord Weir, as to quote her words—

> " By Mrs. Beatty's wish I have asked Lord Weir to see her. She did not feel that her interview with you really cleared the air at all."

The following extracts from Dame K. Furse's evidence show the inaccuracies referred to :—

> " Mr. Hawke : On the 15th July, did you write to Lord Weir : ' Mrs. Beatty has asked me to write to you on her behalf as she is very anxious to have an opportunity of stating her case to you ' ?
>
> " Dame K. Furse : Yes.
>
> " Mr. Hawke : Why that ?
>
> " Dame K. Furse : Because I did not feel that justice had been done to Mrs. Beatty.
>
> " Mr. Hawke : But what injustice is there in a lady resigning and the resignation being accepted ?
>
> " Dame K. Furse : She asked that the resignation should be further considered.
>
> " Mr. Hawke : Who did ?
>
> " Dame K. Furse : Mrs. Beatty.
>
> " Mr. Hawke : . . . Of whom did she ask that, and when ?
>
> " Dame K. Furse : She certainly asked Sir Godfrey Paine.
>
> " Mr. Hawke : When ?
>
> " Dame K. Furse : I am afraid I do not know the date.
>
> " Mr. Hawke : Do you know perfectly well that she was told to remain at her post, and in spite of orders left ?

"Dame K. Furse: I know she left.

"Mr. Hawke: Against orders ?

"Dame K. Furse: I have not seen the orders.

"Mr. Hawke: . . . I put it to you that this letter [to Lord Weir] is written because you were siding with Mrs. Beatty, and endeavouring to injure Miss Pennant ?

"Dame K. Furse: No.

"Mr. Hawke: . . . Why did you not go to Sir Godfrey Paine about it ?

"Dame K. Furse: I had written to Sir Godfrey Paine.

"Mr. Hawke: Instead of to Lord Weir ?

"Dame K. Furse: I had seen him [General Paine] or written.

"Mr. Hawke: I suggest to you that letter [to Lord Weir] was written because you knew Sir Godfrey Paine approved of Miss Pennant, and that you wanted to get past him. Is that true ?

"Dame K. Furse: No."

In cross-examination, Dame K. Furse was pressed by my Counsel to explain why she had objected to communicating with me. It was only then for the first time that I heard the astonishing accusation brought forward in justification of her unfriendly attitude, that I had, she alleged, told her during our interview of July 14th, 1918:—

"That it was generally said that she [Dame K. Furse] had put Mrs. Beatty in as an Agent, to get the post of Commandant for herself [Dame K. Furse]."

This charge was never put to me in cross-examination, and my Counsel drew attention to this fact. I was never given any opportunity of denying it, and yet, on this preposterous statement, which, I protest, is utterly untrue —as untrue as her assertion that she dismissed Mrs. Beckett —Dame K. Furse founded her decision not to co-operate with me though it was war-time.

Surely it is against the interests and the best traditions of the Government Service that the Head of a department should not only have refused on personal grounds to co-operate with the Head of another Department at the most urgent crisis of the war, but should have allowed one of her subordinates, Mrs. Beatty, to approach a member of Parliament, the Ministry of National Service, and the Secretary of a

private organisation (London Suffrage Society) in order to raise an agitation to bring about the dismissal of the head of another Corps. Dame K. Furse's action, supported by the misrepresentations of Mrs. Beatty, Miss Pratt, Miss Andrew, and at a later stage of two total strangers—Miss Strachey (Secretary, London Suffrage Society) and Mr. Tyson Wilson, M.P., has had the serious consequences of bringing about my dismissal from the W.R.A.F. and from the post of Commandant by convincing Sir Auckland Geddes and Lady Rhondda, without enquiry, that I was unfit for a position of responsibility (*see* pages 364-372).

It will be remembered that as soon as General Brancker succeeded General Paine as Master-General of Personnel Miss E. Crowdy (Dame K. Furse's Deputy), a total stranger to me, interviewed him, and informed him that Dame K. Furse did not wish to communicate with me, with the result that at my first official interview with General Brancker he told me that in view of this stipulation he had agreed that Dame K. Furse should deal direct with him instead of, as in the ordinary course, with me. Two days afterwards he dismissed me on the ground that he had heard that I was unpopular and impossible to work with, and to quote his words, "*you were the cause of the resignation of a very efficient staff—that excellent Mrs. Beatty*" (*see* pages 147-150).

The interview on July 14th, 1918, to which Dame K. Furse took exception, was the first and only time that I had a personal conversation with her during the time I was Commandant. I did not know her at all, and had no idea that she was unfriendly. I believed her to be a reasonable and reliable woman, and I was under the impression that as the Head of another Department she would be anxious to co-operate in every way (*see* pages 65, 66).

Unfortunately, I had no witness at the interview in question to corroborate my statement that I had treated Dame K. Furse with cordiality and every courtesy.

It is difficult to understand how the Court could have accepted Dame K. Furse's statement without giving me any opportunity of meeting this charge. During

the course of many years' work and the happiest relations in many parts of the world, I have never heard the slightest hint that my manners had given rise to dissatisfaction. Up to the time of the Inquiry my word has never been called in question or doubted. Their Lordships, however, accepted Dame K. Furse's statement without inquiry as they accepted the word of Miss Pratt, Mrs. Beatty, and Miss Andrew, and adjudge me guilty of insulting and ill-bred behaviour.

In view of the serious reflections cast on me by Dame K. Furse's allegations, I feel it necessary to give in detail extracts from her evidence bearing on this point during her cross-examination by my Counsel :—

"Mr. Hawke : **On Sunday you knew Miss Pratt was going to resign. Before that you knew Mrs. Beatty was going to resign?**

"Dame K. Furse : **On the Friday, I think.**

"Mr. Hawke : Did you mind ?

"Dame K. Furse : No, because I got her back again.

"Mr. Hawke : Did you know the reasons why they were resigning ?

"Dame K. Furse : I knew their reasons, yes, when they told me.

"Mr. Hawke : Did you talk them over with them ?

"Dame K. Furse : A certain amount.

"Mr. Hawke : Did you see them both together or separately ?*

"Dame K. Furse : Separately.

"Mr. Hawke : Did you tell Colonel Bersey on the 1st July that these three women were resigning ?

"Dame K. Furse : I think you have a note of what I said before.

"Mr. Hawke : Yes, but you see I am trying to assist your memory about other things.

"Dame K. Furse : I cannot remember saying anything to Colonel Bersey, except that I was sorry he was having trouble.

"Mr. Hawke : . . . I suggest to you that you told Colonel Bersey before these women's resignations were in fact put in, that they were going to resign ?

[Dame K. Furse did not reply].

"Mr. Hawke : Before the time in which the resignations were put in on the 1st July I am suggesting to you that you knew

* In her evidence Dame K. Furse stated that she also saw Miss Andrew about this time, as I had sent the latter to see her. I did not do so.

Mrs. Beatty, Miss Andrew, Miss Pratt, and perhaps Miss Taylor were going to resign ?

" Dame K. Furse : I have absolutely no recollection of knowing the resignation of any but Miss Pratt and Mrs. Beatty.

" Mr. Hawke : **And you told Colonel Bersey that it was going to happen before it had happened. Now is that true ?**

" Dame K. Furse : **I understood from Mrs. Beatty on the Monday morning that she resigned on the 1st.**

NOTE.—*i.e.*, July 1st, the same day on which this meeting between Dame K. Furse and Mrs. Beatty took place.

" Mr. Hawke : The question is whether you did not tell Colonel Bersey on that morning before the resignations were in that they were going to resign ?

" Dame K. Furse : I do not know.

" Mr. Hawke : Are you prepared to say that the fact of the resignations was not mentioned in your communication to Colonel Bersey ?

" Dame K. Furse : I have no recollection.

" Mr. Hawke : You cannot say it was not mentioned ?

" Dame K. Furse : I cannot say it was not.

" Mr. Hawke : Had Mrs. Beatty or Miss Pratt told you about these five women being refused posts ?

" Dame K. Furse : I have no recollection of it.

" Mr. Hawke : Then you cannot say to the contrary ?

" Dame K. Furse : No.

" Mr. Hawke : And you sought the first opportunity of seeing Miss Douglas-Pennant about it ?

" Dame K. Furse : Yes.

.....

" Mr. Hawke : You called on Miss Douglas-Pennant in fact on the 14th. We are agreed about that date. It was a Sunday ?

" Dame K. Furse : Yes.

" Mr. Hawke : Were you in fact annoyed about Mrs. Beatty's resignation then ?

" Dame K. Furse : I was not annoyed. As I have said before, I was sorry for the sake of the W.R.A.F.

.....

" Mr. Hawke : I suggest to you that you began by saying that she was a most valuable and reliable Officer ?

" Dame K. Furse : I may have.

"Mr. Hawke: Rather suggesting that the blame was on somebody else?

"Dame K. Furse: I do not remember doing it in that sense.

"Mr. Hawke: Did Miss Douglas-Pennant tell you that she had not wanted Mrs. Beatty to resign?

"Dame K. Furse: I do not remember that.

"Mr. Hawke: Are you denying it?

"Dame K. Furse: I have no recollection of it.

"Mr. Hawke: . . . Did she ask you if you knew why Mrs. Beatty had resigned?

"Dame K. Furse: She may have, but I do not remember it.

"Mr. Hawke: Will you say she did not?

"Dame K. Furse: No.

"Mr. Hawke: Did she say that she was quite in the dark about it or words to that effect?

"Dame K. Furse: I do not remember her saying so.

"Mr. Hawke: Are you denying it?

"Dame K. Furse: I do not remember.

"Mr. Hawke: Then I take it you mean you are not denying it. . . . From that date onwards did you communicate a great deal less with Miss Douglas-Pennant than you had been communicating before?

"Dame K. Furse: That was the 14th July. I think I did communicate less with Miss Douglas-Pennant. It was not entirely on account of that.

"Mr. Hawke: Partly on account of that?

"Dame K. Furse: I do not remember its being so.

"Mr. Hawke: Was it partially on account of that?

"Dame K. Furse: **You see Miss Douglas-Pennant made a statement to me at that interview which made it very difficult for me to work with her after that date** [*see* page 339].

"Mr. Hawke: Would you mind telling me whether it was partially on account of that [Mrs. Beatty's resignation] that you dealt less with her [Miss Douglas-Pennant] afterwards?

"Dame K. Furse: In so far as I have just qualified it, it was.

"Mr. Hawke: **So far as I remember no cross-examination was put to Miss Douglas-Pennant about any statement she made to you at that interview, so I am proposing to do it. As Miss Douglas-Pennant had not an opportunity of dealing with it, I will deal with it. It is a fact that for some reason or other you communicated less. When I say communicated I mean business**

communications. So far as seeing her was concerned you had not seen her more than once before?

"Dame K. Furse: It was extraordinarily difficult to see Miss Douglas-Pennant.

"Mr. Hawke: Do not you think you could answer the question without your own little bits of advocacy?

"Dame K. Furse: I had seen her on several occasions before."

NOTE.—(This was the only occasion on which I ever saw Dame K. Furse alone during the time I was Commandant, W.R.A.F. On all other occasions we met at conferences.)

"Mr. Hawke: . . . What was it you said Miss Douglas-Pennant said which you complained of?

"Dame K. Furse: She told me that I ought to know that it was generally said that I had put in Mrs. Beatty as an agent to get the post of Commandant for myself.

"Mr. Hawke: To get the job for yourself?

"Dame K. Furse: Yes.

"Mr. Hawke: It was generally known or generally said?

"Dame K. Furse: She said it was generally said, but she herself did not believe it.

"Mr. Hawke: That seems to have been polite enough. What complaint was there to make about that?

"Dame K. Furse: I saw no reason for it being repeated to me.

"Mr. Hawke: Do you really mean that your obstacle to some extent to co-operate with the Commandant of the W.R.A.F. from that date onwards was due to the fact that she told you that there was the report about which she did not believe?

"Dame K. Furse: No.

"Mr. Hawke: That is what you said?

"Dame K. Furse: No, there were other things at that interview as well.

"Mr. Hawke: What were they?

"Dame K. Furse: That she [Mrs. Beatty] was very disloyal to her. That she had undermined Miss Pratt and Miss Andrew, I think, and various things which I found it extraordinarily difficult to believe, and which gave me a very strong feeling that Miss Douglas-Pennant would never know how to get the best out of the women working with her.

"Mr. Hawke: Why did that prevent you from co-operating with the head of another Branch in a time of national emergency?

"Dame K. Furse: It did not prevent me from co-operating. It only prevented me from seeing Miss Douglas-Pennant more than was absolutely necessary.

.....

"Mr. Hawke: Did you form any opinion of Miss Douglas-Pennant's suitability for this job?

"Dame K. Furse: Yes.

'Earl of Denbigh: You formed the opinion that Miss Douglas-Pennant was not able to get the best out of these ladies she was working with, you said?

"Dame K. Furse: On the 28th June I could only form the opinion from what I heard from Mrs. Beatty and Miss Pratt. After the 14th July, I formed it on my own experience.

"Mr. Hawke: Did you ever express it to anybody?

"Dame K. Furse: Not exactly.

"Mr. Hawke: Did you express it to Lady Rhondda?

"Dame K. Furse: I expressed an opinion as to the transfer of my women of the W.R.N.S. to the W.R.A.F. under the existing conditions.

"Mr. Hawke: Then you never formed an opinion of Miss Pennant's ability; is that what you are saying?

"Dame K. Furse: No, I did.

"Mr. Hawke: Now I want to know whether you ever expressed that. I may take it it was a highly unfavourable one, may I not?

"Dame K. Furse: **It was not highly unfavourable. I found Miss Douglas-Pennant difficult to work with because I never could see her. I very seldom saw her, I will say** (*see* page 79).

.....

"Mr. Hawke: Did you explain your view to anyone?

"Dame K. Furse: Officially or unofficially?

"Mr. Hawke: Either.

"Dame K. Furse: There was a certain amount of talk going on among the different Departments.

"Mr. Hawke: **Did you express your view to Lady Rhondda at any time?**

"Dame K. Furse: **I saw Lady Rhondda in August. She came forward from the Ministry of National Service to ask my opinion, and I told her my anxiety about the W.R.N.S.**

"Mr. Hawke: Then you did express your opinion to Lady Rhondda, and that was before she wrote her memorandum?

"Dame K. Furse: I do not know when she wrote it.

"Mr. Hawke: **She wrote it on the 19th, or dated it the 19th?**

"Dame K. Furse: **I saw Lady Rhondda on the 16th.**"

During the course of the House of Lords Inquiry, Mrs. Steel (Flora Annie, the authoress) saw Dame K. Furse's denial in her evidence that she had ever expressed any adverse opinion regarding me. Mrs. Steel sent the following telegram to the Chairman, Lord Wrenbury:—

"Can give evidence that before June 30th Dame K. Furse did express opinion that Miss Douglas-Pennant was unsuitable for the post and must leave. At your disposal."

I did not know Mrs. Steel, having only met her once at a dinner sixteen years previously. I had never had any further communication with her. To her everlasting credit, Mrs. Steel undertook a seven hours' journey in, to quote her words, "the interests of truth." Her evidence is as follows:—

"Mr. Hawke: At some time in the summer of the year 1918, did you meet Dame K. Furse?

"Mrs. Steel: I did.

"Mr. Hawke: You had not met her before?

"Mrs. Steel: No.

"Mr. Hawke: Did you have a conversation with her, and in the course of conversation did she refer to the Women's Royal Air Force and to Miss Douglas-Pennant?

"Mrs. Steel: Yes, she did.

"Mr. Hawke: And what did she say to you about Miss Douglas-Pennant?

"Mrs. Steel: **She said that she was impossible; that she was ruining the W.R.A.F. and that she was so unpopular that it was better that she left.**

"Mr. Hawke: What did you say?

"Mrs. Steel: I said that having heard as most people have heard in London at the time that there were difficulties in the Air Force, anyone who tried to put the wrong right was almost certain to be unpopular.

"Mr. Hawke: What did Dame K. Furse say to that?

"Mrs. Steel: She said that was so undoubtedly, but that Miss Douglas-Pennant had a great lack of tact, and **that she did**

not give the law that ought to be allowed to young boys. She [Dame K. Furse] **said it was impossible to judge by ordinary standards boys who knew that very probably the next morning they might be killed in an Air Flight. . . . That it was impossible to judge these lads by the same standards that you would judge the ordinary normal lad, and that they must be allowed law.**

"Mr. Hawke: Judging the lads in their standards of what?

"Mrs. Steel: **She was talking of the laxity that was said to prevail in regard to the lads.**

"Mr. Hawke: **It was impossible to judge of that by ordinary standards?**

"Mrs. Steel: **It was impossible, and that they should be allowed more law.**

"Mr. Hawke: I think you had something to say to that?

"Mrs. Steel: **Yes, I demurred. I did not do so on moral grounds, but on the ground of the exigencies of the Service. I said that anybody who had been roystering half the night could not possibly be in a fit state to go up in the morning with safety.** That is what I said, and here the conversation ended.

"Mr. Hawke: How did you come to wire to the Committee?

"Mrs. Steel: **Because I saw in the 'Morning Post' and other papers a statement that Dame K. Furse had said that she had never formulated any distinct charge against Miss Douglas-Pennant, and I knew that she had so formulated it to me. I did it simply in the interests of truth. This is an Inquiry to find out the truth.**

"Mr. Hawke: Are you a friend of Miss Douglas-Pennant?

"Mrs. Steel: I met her once long years ago, but I do not know her at all."

I had never discussed any questions of W.R.A.F. discipline with Dame K. Furse as she had nothing to do with the matter.

She admitted in her evidence that she had formed her opinion on the views expressed by Mrs. Beatty and Miss Pratt.

As to whether the junior men officers in the Air Force suffered from too strict discipline, and—to quote Dame K. Furse's words—"they should be allowed more law," I cannot venture an opinion. I had nothing whatever to do with them. Brigadier-General G. Livingston was responsible for their selection and training.

I had merely given instructions to W.R.A.F. Officers in charge of Hostels in Air Force Camps that while encouraging and promoting all forms of healthy recreation between the men and women, they must take steps to ensure that the women spent the night in their own quarters in the Hostels, except in the case of those who had special leave of absence. General Paine, an experienced Naval Officer, entirely concurred.

The W.R.A.F. rank and file appeared to appreciate the fact that I treated them with the consideration and confidence due to sensible patriotic women, and they showed the fullest trust in me whenever I came into personal touch with them.

It will be noted that Mrs. Steel informed Lord Wrenbury in her telegram that the interview in which Dame K. Furse had cast reflections on me took place before June 30th. *This statement shows that the opinion attributed to me by Dame K. Furse must have been based on pure hearsay, as the only personal conversation I ever had with Dame K. Furse during the time I was Commandant was the interview a fortnight later (July 14th) with reference to Mrs. Beatty.*

In her evidence Dame K. Furse admits that she had no opportunity of forming any personal opinion of me until this interview on July 14th.

> "Mr. Hawke: Did you form any opinion of Miss Douglas-Pennant's suitability for this job?
>
> "Dame K. Furse: Yes . . . . On the 28th June I could only form the opinion from what I heard from Mrs. Beatty and Miss Pratt. After the 14th July, I formed it on my own experience.

Dame K. Furse added:

> **"I found Miss Douglas-Pennant difficult to work with, because I never could see her. I very seldom saw her, I will say."**

With reference to this complaint, I protest that all communications from Dame K. Furse were immediately attended to. On the two occasions when she expressed her desire for an appointment, I fixed a meeting at once.

With regard to her further statement that she constantly failed to find me in the office when she wished

to telephone to me, I submit again, that it is unreasonable to expect the head of a department with a vast amount of work outside the office concerning the women employed in over 500 camps, to be available personally at the telephone when rung up unexpectedly.

During the course of the Inquiry, certain correspondence was produced by the Air Ministry. Among this was a letter from General Brancker addressed to me, which I had never seen. It was written after my dismissal, and he informed me that "the Air Ministry had no further use for your services," as the Commandant, W.R.A.F., must be *persona grata* to the head of the W.R.N.S. and to the head of the Q.M.A.A.C., and he assured me that he had satisfied himself, after consulting certain people, that I would never attain that position.

I have already pointed out (*see* pages 140-141) that the people who were mentioned by General Brancker, as having advised him in this matter, were almost total strangers to me. His action in refraining from approaching those who knew me, and were acquainted with the true facts of the case, was unjust to me in the extreme.

During the Inquiry, Counsel for the Air Ministry disowned this letter, and stated that it had not been written by General Brancker. The Air Ministry Counsel declared that it had been drafted for General Brancker's approval, and that his signature had been inadvertently added when the letter was typed.

General Brancker's evidence did not bear out the statement of Mr. Rigby Swift (Counsel for the Air Ministry). General Brancker admitted that he had written the letter in question, but that it was not sent, as the Secretary of the Air Ministry had substituted another one for it, on the grounds that General Brancker was assuming too full responsibility for my dismissal. The letter throws a curious light on the influence that Dame K. Furse exercised over the Air Ministry, in spite of the fact that she was an official in another Government Department, and had no jurisdiction over the W.R.A.F. or responsibility for that Corps.

It will be remembered that twenty-one officers and nine hundred ratings (rank and file) had transferred from the W.R.N.S. to the W.R.A.F. on July 1st, 1918, but it must not be forgotten that in most cases these units remained under the care of their W.R.N.S. officers, who had themselves transferred to the W.R.A.F., and they were accommodated in the same quarters in the Air Force Camps as heretofore—the camps only having changed their names from Royal Naval Air Stations to Air Force Camps. It is difficult to see, therefore, how with any justice, Dame K. Furse could blame the W.R.A.F. and complain of the treatment of these women, when her own arrangements continued to be carried on by officers who a short time ago were under her command. As a matter of fact, the change of authority in most cases had never actually taken place, as it will be remembered that Dame K. Furse had, unknown to Sir Godfrey Paine and myself, informed the transferred W.R.N.S. officers by telegram and written instructions (*see* pages 76-77) that they and the rank and file were to remain under her control, and that the transfer was temporarily postponed.

No complaints reached me, either from Dame K. Furse or from the officers in question. I kept strictly to the promise given by Sir Godfrey Paine and myself, in response to Dame K. Furse's request, that we should not issue any instructions or communicate with these units, until certain arrangements had been arrived at between the Air Ministry and the Admiralty. It was only after my dismissal, that I heard for the first time the reports which were spread of my alleged cruelty and neglect of these women, which, it was said, gave ample justification for Dame K. Furse's action in bringing about my dismissal.

I was not aware at the time of my appointment that Dame K. Furse had nominated her Colleague, Miss Crowdy, as Commandant, W.R.A.F.—it appeared that after my dismissal she was again recommended by Dame K. Furse for the vacant post. General Brancker's decision that the appointment of Commandant, W.R.A.F.,

must have the approval of the head of the W.R.N.S. and the Q.M.A.A.C. seems to create a new and dangerous precedent. That two officers employed in entirely separate Ministries—*i.e.*, Admiralty and War Office, should be given the prerogative of deciding whether the services of the Head of another Department should be dispensed with or retained, raises, I submit, a serious question of policy in the Government Service. In Departments of less recent growth than the Air Ministry, it has been the custom in the past that efficiency and merit, and not personal predilection and friendship should influence appointments. Without casting any reflection on the judgment or motives of either Dame K. Furse or Mrs. Burleigh Leach, it is conceivable that any such arrangement might lead to favouritism and result in appointments becoming the exclusive monopoly of small circles of friends.

Amid the tangle of petty intrigue and misrepresentations which have been such prominent features in this case, I do not feel it is worth while to search out the motives which prompted those chiefly concerned in bringing about my dismissal. The outstanding facts remain that I was suddenly thrown out of the Force to meet their wishes, and neither the public nor I have ever been allowed to know why, excepting that I was alleged to be grossly unpopular, not, I may be permitted to point out, with my senior officer or with the W.R.A.F. under my command, but with a small group of people outside, some of whom I did not even know by sight or by name. It is significant that all my calumniators obtained their information from the same source, *i.e.*, Mrs. Beatty, Miss Andrew, and Miss Pratt.

So far as I was concerned I did not feel that it was right while I was a public servant to take sides on questions of political policy. Whether it was in the public interest or against the public interest that the Air Ministry was established as a separate entity and the Women's Royal Air Force constituted by means of the transfer of units from the W.R.N.S. and the Q.M.A.A.C. was not

for me to enter into. That matter had been settled by the War Cabinet long before my appointment.

During the few weeks I was Commandant I never discussed this matter or expressed any opinion on what appeared to be a highly contentious question at the Air Ministry. My duty seemed to lie in the direction of carrying out instructions as promptly and quietly as possible, and this I endeavoured to do. To those who read this statement with an unprejudiced mind, I may point out that I never deviated from this attempt, and I had the splendid support and co-operation of all those in the Air Ministry, the Royal Air Force, and W.R.A.F. who had the welfare of the Corps at heart. The result of our efforts began to show themselves as soon as the disaffected officers had left. Nevertheless, these people, with the support of Dame K. Furse and others, were able to bring influence to bear through Lady Rhondda and Sir Auckland Geddes on Lord Weir as a result of which I was dismissed without any inquiry, and without the knowledge of General Paine, who could at once have proved their allegations to be unfounded.

I am quite in the dark as to the real motives which induced Dame K. Furse to take this line and refuse to co-operate. It can hardly be believed that the trivial allegations she brought against me in her evidence could be the true cause of such a serious step at a moment of grave national peril. Dame K. Furse herself admitted in her evidence that she had hardly ever seen me. It is difficult, therefore, to believe that her refusal to communicate with me was on personal grounds.

General Paine was present at most of the interviews with Dame K. Furse, and it is clear from his replies to my Counsel that he was satisfied that I did everything in my power to co-operate with her.

> "Mr. Stuart Bevan: . . . . . You state . . . that you are convinced that Miss Douglas-Pennant was only too ready to co-operate in every possible way with Dame K. Furse?
>
> "General Paine: I am sure she was.
>
> "Mr. Stuart Bevan: Is that your view?

"General Paine: Yes.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: That was on the 7th August, and did that remain your view so long as you continued to hold office as Master-General of Personnel?

"General Paine: Yes."

It is possible that her antagonism was directed against the policy which had set up a separate Air Force rather than against my personal efforts to carry out the work entrusted to me. If it were on grounds of policy, it may be that Dame K. Furse, therefore, considered it justifiable to prevent at all costs the success of a scheme of which she and certain others disapproved. If these were, in fact, the grounds of her refusal to co-operate with me, I must again point out that I was in no way responsible for the policy laid down by my superiors.

A somewhat similar situation seems to have arisen in the Red Cross, when Dame K. Furse disapproved of the policy decided on by the authorities. Only a few months before, she and others while serving at the Headquarters of the British Red Cross Society (Voluntary Aid Department) had refused to obey the orders of their chief, Sir Arthur Stanley, and of the Central Joint Committee of which he was chairman, on the ground that they did not agree with the policy laid down by his Committee and the Military Authorities at the War Office. Serious friction arose which led to the resignation in November, 1917, of Dame K. Furse, who was then Commandant of the Voluntary Aid Detachment. In defiance of the chairman and of the regulations, the Headquarters staff was circularised; a meeting of Dame K. Furse's supporters was held and every endeavour was made to persuade the whole of the staff to leave their work and resign in order to support Dame K. Furse. Sir Arthur Stanley and other officials of the British Red Cross Society were able to convince the majority that this action would seriously hamper the work for the wounded in the hospitals at one of the worst moments of the war and bring discredit on the British Red Cross. Several of the disaffected, however, resigned with Dame K. Furse, and when, shortly

afterwards, she was appointed head of the W.R.N.S., they formed the nucleus of her Headquarters staff.

The following extract from the letter of Sir Arthur Stanley and Lord Chilston to the "Times," dated November 15th, 1917, expresses the opinion of the British Red Cross authorities on this matter :—

> **"It is clearly impossible to carry on the work of the V.A.D. or any other organisation if the Officers of the organisation are to be at liberty to execute or not as they think fit the orders of the governing body.**
>
> **"This is what has happened in this case, and the Central Joint V.A.D. Committee deeply regret the necessity for accepting the resignations of Dame Katherine Furse and those of the staff who think like her that they are at liberty to prevent any policy being carried out of which they themselves do not approve.**
>
> "'Tending to better discipline,' it is probable that the changes which have now been made at Devonshire House* will prove to be a step in the right direction.
>
> "(*Signed*) ARTHUR STANLEY, Chairman, Central Joint V.A.D. Committee and British Red Cross Society.
>
> " ,, CHILSTON, Chief County Director (British Red Cross Society)."

In the Report of the House of Lords Inquiry, however, their Lordships blame me for the difficulties alleged by Dame K. Furse and commend her intervention. Their considered opinion is as follows :—

> "The suggestion that Dame K. Furse was a party to any such intrigue as suggested, is not borne out by the evidence. As Director of the W.R.N.S., and having regard to the intended transfer of W.R.N.S. to W.R.A.F., she took a keen and laudable interest in the W.R.A.F. organisation, and (as regards Mrs. Beatty) in Mrs. Beatty's resignation of her post in the W.R.A.F. and she communicated with various people in these matters. She had nothing to do with inducing Mrs. Beatty's resignation. After a time, no doubt, relations between Miss Douglas-Pennant and Dame K. Furse were strained. At any rate, they were so after Miss Douglas-Pennant had said on the 14th July that it was generally said that Dame K. Furse had put Mrs. Beatty

* The Headquarters of the V.A.D. (British Red Cross Society).

into the W.R.A.F. as an agent to get the post of Commandant for herself (Dame Katherine)—a statement which had no foundation in fact.

"Indeed, Dame Katherine had already refused the W.R.A.F. on another occasion. The suggestion that Dame Katherine was a party to the alleged intrigue is, in our opinion, not borne out by the evidence. Sir Godfrey Paine, who was Miss Douglas-Pennant's witness, could see nothing in it. We think it unnecessary to pursue this matter further."

.....

"WE FIND that there was no intrigue, no concerted action by the parties accused, or by any of them, to induce or compel Miss Douglas-Pennant's removal or resignation by any improper means."

It is difficult to follow the reasoning which led the House of Lords Committee of Inquiry to form this opinion and to accept without investigation Dame K. Furse's allegations, without giving me any opportunity of denying them (*see* page 339).

Their Lordships' attention had been drawn to Dame K. Furse's other inaccuracies. They had heard her admit under cross-examination that her statement which reflected so cruelly on a fine Officer—Mrs. Beckett—was untrue.

The evidence volunteered by Mrs. Steele had, moreover, made it clear that Dame K. Furse, though a stranger to me, had decided on hearsay a few days after I became Commandant that I "was impossible—ruining the W.R.A.F.—unsuitable for the post and must leave" (*see* page 346).

CHAPTER XXIX.

Lady Rhondda's Secret Statement.

In spite of the fact that the Committee had sat for nine days no explanation had as yet been given for Lord Weir's sudden determination to dismiss me, though this was one of the chief points of the Inquiry. Those who like myself were still after many months completely in the dark as to his reasons looked forward to his evidence in the hope that the mystery would at length be cleared up. At first Lord Weir, however, seemed unable to throw any light on the matter or to make any clear statement. My Counsel pressed him closely regarding the allegations brought against me for the first time in the Air Ministry's Statement of Case. He was asked to substantiate the charges that I was incompetent and tactless, but he failed to do so, and admitted that he did not know of any instances. He was invited to explain his grounds for informing me that my dismissal was due to the fact that certain Women's Organisations would not co-operate. Lord Weir stated under cross-examination that he had no reason to think that I was in any way to blame.

"Mr. Hawke: ..... You know you have said to-day, and you said in the House of Lords on another occasion to which I will draw your attention, that Sir Godfrey Paine on several occasions referred to difficulties with other Women's Organisations?

"Lord Weir: Yes.

"Mr. Hawke: .... I want to know what Women's Organisations you suggest Sir Godfrey Paine referred to?

"Lord Weir: **Well, I suggest the W.R.N.S. for example.** I do suggest that on some occasion Sir Godfrey Paine did refer to some trouble with the W.R.N.S.

"Mr. Hawke: Between Miss Douglas-Pennant and the W.R.N.S.?

"Lord Weir: **Between the Department and the W.R.N.S.**

"Mr. Hawke: The suggestion here is that it was lack of co-operation by her with this Department. **I want to know when, at any time, give me any date you can think of and any Women's**

Force that he referred to, in which he said that Miss Douglas-Pennant could not co-operate with them?

"Lord Weir: **I do not say that he ever told me Miss Douglas-Pennant could not co-operate with them.**

"Mr. Hawke: That is quite fair and frank?

"Lord Weir: I want to be very frank. **It is not against Miss Douglas-Pennant; it is that there was friction and lack of co-operation between the Departments.**

"Mr. Hawke: Now that is quite fair and frank. Now I may suggest to you that what Sir Godfrey Paine referred to in regard to co-operation with the W.R.N.S. was the difficulty between him and Dame K. Furse about officering the W.R.A.F. That is what it was, was it not?

"Lord Weir: I cannot tell. What I want to make clear about that is, that **the impression I got was not necessarily that Miss Douglas-Pennant was at fault in it. It might be the other organisations or other women that were at fault.**

"Mr. Hawke: **So that really the complaints of Sir Godfrey Paine were in no sense personal to Miss Douglas-Pennant?**

"Lord Weir: **The impression I formed was not necessarily against Miss Douglas-Pennant—that she was the cause of the friction with the other Departments.**"

Later on, however, the true facts at last came out. Lord Weir's sudden determination to order my dismissal from the Force was arrived at after an interview between Major Baird (Parliamentary Secretary, Air Ministry) and Sir Auckland Geddes, during which the latter informed Major Baird that Lady Rhondda had made a very serious statement concerning the W.R.A.F. During the course of the evidence of Lord Weir, Sir Auckland Geddes, and Major Baird, the following facts transpired regarding this Report, which for so many months had been kept secret. It appears that Sir Auckland Geddes (early in August, 1918), just before the Women's Department, National Service, was abolished, instructed Lady Rhondda, the head of that Department, to write an account of all the women's Corps and Organisations engaged in War work. She did so, but for some unexplained reason she omitted to come to me for the necessary information regarding the W.R.A.F., nor was I even told that she was writing a Report. As Lady Rhondda had no jurisdiction over the W.R.A.F., and

never had any official dealings with that Corps, it was obviously impossible for her to obtain any first-hand knowledge unless she consulted either General Paine or myself. In her evidence, Lady Rhondda admitted that she intended her Report to be adverse, and that she had relied for her facts on information she received from Dame K. Furse, Mrs. Beatty, and Miss Andrew, none of whom could have any accurate knowledge of the true circumstances.

In reply to her Counsel Lady Rhondda stated that she depended on the views expressed by them, though she acknowledged that she only knew Mrs. Beatty, Miss Andrew, and Miss Pratt very slightly (*see* page 365).

"Mr. Barrington Ward: Had you also those papers before you when you wrote the passages criticising the W.R.A.F. administration?

"Lady Rhondda: Yes.

"Mr. Barrington Ward: Did you attach importance to them at all?

"Lady Rhondda: **Yes, I attached a great deal of importance to these three women's papers.**

"Mr. Barrington Ward: Looking back, do you think it was right that you should attach importance to them?

"Lady Rhondda: Yes.

"Mr. Barrington Ward: Mr. Hawke asked you whether the Report was intended to be adverse. May I ask you was it intended to be accurate?

"Lady Rhondda: Yes.

"Mr. Barrington Ward: And was it in fact accurate?

"Lady Rhondda: Yes, absolutely, I believe.

My Counsel questioned Lady Rhondda as to why she had not made her accusations openly, and given me an opportunity of defending myself. Lady Rhondda, however, seemed unable to explain—

"Mr. Hawke: Why could not you go and see Miss Douglas-Pennant? You saw other people apparently?

"Lady Rhondda: Yes. Well, it did not seem to me that I could. I did not feel that I could, very well.

"Mr. Hawke: Did you go and see Sir Godfrey Paine?

"Lady Rhondda: No.

"Mr. Hawke: Well, why not?

"Lady Rhondda: It never occurred to me. I was going to see Lord Weir—why should I see Sir Godfrey Paine?

"Mr. Hawke: Do you not see that you were making a report which was adverse, and was intended to be adverse?

"Lady Rhondda: Yes, undoubtedly.

"Mr. Hawke: And yet **you allowed the persons implicated no opportunity of explanation?**

"Lady Rhondda: **But why should I go and see them? I knew the facts.**

"Mr. Hawke: Do not ask me questions, because I might be tempted to answer them.

"Lady Rhondda: Well, do.

"Mr. Hawke: Oh, no. However, you can see no reason why you should have gone to see those people who were implicated in your accusations?

"Lady Rhondda: Once I was going to see Lord Weir, it seems to me it would have been improper that I should go and see anybody else in the Air Ministry.

"Mr. Hawke: **We know you did see Dame Katherine Furse.** Did you see anybody else?

"Lady Rhondda: I read the papers of the three women [Miss Pratt, Mrs. Beatty, Miss Andrew].

"Mr. Hawke: No, did you see anybody else?

"Lady Rhondda: **Yes, I saw Mrs. Beatty, and I read the papers of all those three women."**

The following Report, written by Lady Rhondda, August 19th, 1918, and dated August 2nd, 1918, was published in a White Paper nearly a year after my dismissal. I then saw it for the first time as I had never been permitted to know of its existence. I had, therefore, no opportunity of refuting the misleading statements it contained, though copies were forwarded by Sir Auckland Geddes to Mr. Bonar Law (Chancellor of the Exchequer), Sir Eric Geddes (First Lord of the Admiralty), and to Lord Milner (Secretary of State for War).

QUEEN MARY'S ARMY AUXILIARY CORPS AND WOMEN'S ROYAL NAVAL SERVICE.

"Amongst the Q.M.A.A.C. and the W.R.N.S. the conditions are satisfactory, as Lord Stanhope, speaking in the House of

Lords, stated on July 25th: 'All the Units have their own responsible officers, and these officers are again responsible to other officers, who inspect them and assist them in every way.'

WOMEN'S ROYAL AIR FORCE.

"The W.R.A.F. is still very disorganised, despite the fact that the Corps has been in existence seven months. Although the constitution of the Corps has obviously been drafted on the model of the Q.M.A.A.C., no attempt has apparently been made to give effect to the principles on which such a Corps should be conducted.

"In order to obtain satisfactory results in any of these organisations, the guiding principle of control of women by women must be followed as far as possible. It is not too much to say that unless this principle is observed, chaos and disaster are bound to follow.

"To ensure satisfactory control of the women, it would appear essential that one of the first steps in the formation of a corps would be to provide for an adequate supply of officers, more especially the senior ones. The success of any corps is largely dependent on the standard laid down by the officers, and in the case of a new formation, it is to the senior officers that the juniors and rank and file will look for guidance and control.

"Yet in the W.R.A.F. practically no senior officers have been placed in control, etc., in the areas, and there are large numbers of workers in camps throughout the country with no women officers whatever in control. This has led to a state of disorganisation, inefficiency, and lack of discipline amongst the workers, which, unless speedily remedied, will bring all the corps into disrepute and seriously prejudice them, as the general public do not make any distinctions between the different corps.

"That the time has been amply sufficient is shown by the fact that the W.R.N.S., which is only two months senior to the W.R.A.F., has been satisfactorily organised on the lines laid down in Fleet Order 414 (N. 344–4. 2, 1918) since last February.

(*Signed*) RHONDDA."

As Lord Stanhope pointed out during the Debate in the House of Lords (*see* page 242), Lady Rhondda's Report is not only misleading but it is highly inaccurate. It seems inconceivable that she should have relied for her facts on hearsay, and accepted, without enquiry, information supplied by prejudiced

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Probationary Officers at Avery Hill, August, 1918

Presented to MISS V. DOUGLAS PENNANT *by the W.R.A.F. Staff*

persons only. There is no doubt that Sir Auckland Geddes was seriously misled as to the true state of affairs. He was allowed to believe that the W.R.A.F. was only two months junior to the W.R.N.S., and had been given every opportunity of becoming a well-organised Corps. This statement is inaccurate. It is well-known that the W.R.N.S. was started in November, 1917, and Dame K. Furse corroborated this fact in her evidence. The W.R.A.F., on the other hand, did not come into official existence until many months later, *i.e.*, April, 1918. Brig.-General Livingston and Colonel Bersey had been in charge of the women attached to the Royal Flying Corps who formed the nucleus of the W.R.A.F. since February, 1918, more than three months after the setting-up of the W.R.N.S.

It was plain from Sir Auckland Geddes' evidence that when he insisted on my dismissal he was under the impression that I had been Commandant for many months, and had neglected to take any necessary steps to organise the Corps. There is no doubt, however, that Lady Rhondda was fully aware that I had only been Commandant eight weeks when she wrote this Report. Sir Auckland Geddes in his evidence stated that he instructed Lady Rhondda to make a full enquiry into the details of the W.R.A.F. organisation. He cannot have been aware that Lady Rhondda did not discuss the matter with either Sir Godfrey Paine or myself, or with anyone in a position to supply her with accurate facts, and that the misleading statements she made were based on misrepresentation and unfounded allegations which the slightest enquiry would have proved to be untrue.

Lady Rhondda's statement that no steps had been taken to appoint Senior or other Officers to ensure discipline in the Camps is wholly untrue. If Lady Rhondda had made any enquiry from those responsible she would have learnt how greatly she had been misled by her informants. If she had come to me direct I would have given her, with the greatest pleasure, full details of the numerous schemes

started for the welfare of the W.R.A.F. I could have shown her the Depot Hostels and the Officers' Training Centre, from which I was turning out batches of about 200 Officers every three weeks to supervise the women working in the Camps. When writing her Report, Lady Rhondda cannot have been aware that over 16,000 women had applied for Officers' posts at W.R.A.F. Headquarters during one week-end in answer to our advertisement. It was evident that she knew nothing of the splendid response I had received from Heads of Training Colleges, Women's University Halls, and the leading Women's organisations, in reply to my personal letters asking them to recommend suitable women for senior posts. As I have repeatedly stated, shortage of Officers was entirely due to absence of adequate training accommodation which the Air Ministry had failed to provide me with, and not in any way to lack of suitable candidates. In view of the unmerited reflections cast on me by Lady Rhondda, I may be allowed to point out that in spite of these difficulties, I succeeded in training 480 W.R.A.F. Officers during the nine weeks I was Commandant. Had I not succeeded in obtaining the loan of training accommodation in my private capacity from the London County Council, it would have been impossible to train more than 25 Officers at a time.*

My Counsel questioned Lady Rhondda regarding her inaccurate statements. It will be seen from her reply that she appears to have listened to gossip, which she did not trouble to investigate before repeating it to Sir Auckland Geddes, and that she did not even remember from whom she heard these tales.

> "Mr. Hawke: Now, who told you the W.R.N.S. was only two months senior to the W.R.A.F.?
>
> "Lady Rhondda: I was assuming the W.R.A.F. were starting about the beginning of February, and that the W.R.N.S. started about the beginning of December.
>
> "Mr. Hawke: The only way we can assume that the W.R.A.F. started in February is by taking preparations as being the start.

* Lady Rhondda's statements were untrue at the time her Report was written. They were, however, an accurate description of the conditions which existed before I became Commandant.

"Lady Rhondda: By taking the time when officials went in there—when you had officials—yes.

"Mr. Hawke: Did the W.R.N.S. begin in that sense? In the year 1917?

"Lady Rhondda: Well, as far as my memory goes, the W.R.N.S. began in December 1917.

.....

"Mr. Hawke: It is the fact, is it not—I am not going to ask you to give me a date to a week, or anything like it; but it is the fact that in the sense in which I am speaking now—the beginning of the W.R.N.S. was in October or November 1917?

"Lady Rhondda: I cannot tell you for certain what the date was.

"Mr. Hawke: That is about right, is it not?

"Lady Rhondda: I cannot tell you at all—my impression was, it was in December; but I am not prepared to swear to it.

"Mr. Hawke: When you made this statement, did you verify your references at all?

"Lady Rhondda: Oh, yes—at the time I did.

"Mr. Hawke: **Who was it told you that the W.R.N.S. were only two months senior to the W.R.A.F.?**

"Lady Rhondda: **I looked it up in the official record, no doubt.**

"Mr. Hawke: **What official record?**

"Lady Rhondda: **I have not it here, and I am afraid I have forgotten absolutely where I looked it up.** I am sorry I cannot give you that.

"Mr. Hawke: **Did it occur to you that the two Forces were not comparable in this respect?**

"Lady Rhondda: **No.**

.....

"Mr. Hawke: We have heard to-day and before, that in the case of the W.R.A.F. there was a very large number of men—by which I mean women—and a very large number of personnel thrown on to the Force before there were Officers?

"Lady Rhondda: Yes.

"Mr. Hawke: They were quite two different things for the purpose of comparison?

"Lady Rhondda: No; I do not agree.

.....

"Mr. Hawke: Was any of this suggested to you by Dame K. Furse?

"Lady Rhondda: I do not think so, but I do not recollect for certain. I was talking to everybody—I was living in that world, if you understand, and **I cannot tell you where I got my information from.**

"Mr. Hawke: I want you to think. Was not this suggested to you by Dame Katherine Furse?

"Lady Rhondda: I do not think so—but what I am trying to explain is that I was living in a world in which that was soaked into one day by day, and hour by hour, by all the people you met, and **I had not the least idea what individual told me.**

"Mr. Hawke: Can you give me a comparison of the size of the W.R.A.F. and the W.R.N.S.?

"Lady Rhondda: Yes—the W.R.A.F. were an infinitely bigger body—they must have been about 14,000 then, and the W.R.N.S. were small.

It will be noted that Lady Rhondda concluded her Report by highly commending Dame K. Furse's organisation of the W.R.N.S. which Corps she declared had had the same difficulties as the W.R.A.F. to contend with, and had successfully overcome them. In making this statement Lady Rhondda cannot have recollected that the W.R.N.S. began with a small number of women, and an appropriate number of Officers, and that the Corps developed gradually as necessity arose, and remained as it was intended to remain a small Force, the maximum strength being 6,392. The W.R.A.F., on the other hand, started with a large number of rank and file transferred from the War Office and the Admiralty when the Air Ministry was first set up. It will be remembered that when I became Commandant I was faced with the serious situation that there were only 73 Officers in the Force to supervise the many thousands of women employed in over 500 Air Force Camps.

Lady Rhondda's Report did not end here. It transpired during the course of the Inquiry that she supplemented it with a secret and apparently most serious statement, which General Paine and I were not permitted to know of, which, it appears, she (Lady Rhondda) had received from a Miss Strachey, *who had obtained her information from the same source as Mr. Tyson Wilson, M.P.,—i.e., Mrs. Beatty and Miss Andrew.*

Lady Rhondda acknowledged that when she asked Mrs. Beatty to come and see her with regard to this "serious statement," she only knew her slightly, "but was rather impressed by her paper." Of Miss Andrew, Lady Rhondda seems to have known equally little. In her evidence, she states that she had met Miss Andrew at a Club in Cardiff, at a time when there was some idea of the latter becoming employed in the Ministry of National Service, and that she (Lady Rhondda) "formed rather a high impression of her. She was a competent and modest sort of girl." Yet it was on the evidence of these two women, supported by Dame K. Furse, all of whom were temporary war-workers, that Lady Rhondda felt justified in advising Sir Auckland Geddes to insist on my dismissal (*see* page 168).

Lady Rhondda's evidence shows that she considered the information she received from Miss Strachey to be most grave, and her Counsel, Mr. Barrington Ward, appeared to think it inadvisable that the details of this serious communication should be mentioned in Court.

"Mr. Barrington Ward: I do not want to ask what she [Miss Strachey] said to you, but did she make a communication to you?

"Lady Rhondda: Yes.

"Mr. Barrington Ward: Did you do anything as a result of that communication?

"Lady Rhondda: Yes, I did. Miss Strachey came to me because she was very upset at the state of affairs in the W.R.A.F. and her Committee felt so worried about it, that they did not feel justified in recruiting any further officers or rank and file for the W.R.A.F. and she came to me as being Head of the National Service, because she thought the position was serious, and she ought to lay it before me. I felt that the position was so serious—I knew before that the position was bad in the W.R.A.F. and that is what made me feel that I ought to take some action, and I went to see Sir Auckland Geddes because it seemed to me that was what I ought to do, and I laid the position before him, and he told me he wished me to see Lord Weir."

"Mr. Barrington Ward: Did it take some little time to arrange an appointment with Lord Weir?

"Lady Rhondda: Yes, it took about a fortnight—I should think round about that.

"Mr. Barrington Ward: **Before you went to see Lord Weir, did you see Dame Katherine Furse?**

"Lady Rhondda: **Yes, I did.**

"Mr. Barrington Ward: She says it is on the 16th August—would that be right?

"Lady Rhondda: I should say so.

"Mr. Barrington Ward: Did you also try to see some other Heads of Women's Corps?

"Lady Rhondda: Yes, I tried to see both Mrs. Leach and Dame Katherine Furse; but Mrs. Leach was away and I could not see her, so **I only saw Dame Katherine.**

"Mr. Barrington Ward: On the 19th August, Sir Auckland Geddes drafted a communication to go to Lord Weir, and your Report was dated and signed on the 26th August?

"Lady Rhondda: Yes.

.....

Mr. Barrington Ward: **"I think on the 23rd August, Lord Weir received from Sir Auckland Geddes a communication,** and had you an appointment to see him on the 26th?

"Lady Rhondda: Yes.

"Mr. Barrington Ward: That was a Monday?

"Lady Rhondda: Yes.

"Mr. Barrington Ward: **Did you go there on the Monday morning.**

"Lady Rhondda: **Yes, with Miss Strachey."**

It will be seen that Lady Rhondda in her evidence declares that Miss Strachey's Committee (Women's Service Bureau, London Suffrage Society) did not feel justified in recruiting any further Officers or rank and file for the W.R.A.F. under the alleged circumstances. What these circumstances were I have never been permitted to know, but as shortage of Officers has been one of the chief accusations made against me by Lady Rhondda, it seems difficult to understand why Miss Strachey's Committee, which presumably had the welfare of the Corps at heart, should have thought it right, at a critical moment of the War, to prevent Officers being recruited to remedy the alleged defects, and to meet the man-power shortage.

As to Miss Strachey, I never heard of her action until her name was mentioned by Lord Weir and Lady Rhondda in their evidence, and I was unaware

that the Employment Registry, of which I learnt she is the Secretary, had recruited for the W.R.A.F. After careful enquiry, I have been assured that so far as anyone at Headquarters was aware she never had any dealings with the W.R.A.F., though it is possible that unknown to us she may have passed on applications from her Registry to the official Recruiting Bureau.

It seems incredible that the word of a total stranger should have been accepted without question, especially when it is remembered that *I was not permitted to hear her charges or given any opportunity of defending myself against them before being dismissed.*

Long after my dismissal, it transpired that Miss Strachey, when taking the grave step of approaching the Ministry of National Service and Lord Weir, did so without the knowledge or authority of her President, Lady Frances Balfour, and other prominent members of her Committee. The Gilbertian position thus arose that Lady Frances Balfour, Lord Henry Bentinck, M.P., Mr. J. H. Thomas, M.P., Mrs. Mandell Creighton, and others signed a letter to the Press protesting against my dismissal, while on the other hand, their Secretary, Miss Strachey, had, unknown to them, been one of the chief instruments in bringing it about (*see* pages 188-189).

I had received letters from several members of the Committee expressing their indignation at the treatment a public servant had received, and assuring me that having known me for many years they had every confidence in my work, and would do all in their power to get the matter cleared up.

One of these wrote to assure me : "*of course you will be righted, though it may not be to-day, nor to-morrow, but the truth is bound to come uppermost,*" and urged me to discuss the matter with Miss P. Strachey, as she felt confident that the latter would be anxious for the sake of the women to assist me in getting the matter righted. I endeavoured to make an appointment with her, but was informed on the telephone that she had left London for some months.

Some weeks after the House of Lords Inquiry had brought to light Miss Strachey's action, the present Chairman of the Women's Service Bureau was approached and requested to explain whether Miss Strachey had communicated with Lady Rhondda and Lord Weir with the knowledge and concurrence of her Committee. The Chairman replied to the effect that Miss Strachey had been authorised by her Committee to do so. It must be pointed out that among other of the members of the Advisory Council (Women's Service Bureau): were Dame K. Furse, W.R.N.S., Miss R. Crowdy, W.R.N.S., Mrs. Burleigh Leach, Q.M.A.A.C., Mrs. Chalmers Watson (Sir Auckland Geddes' sister), and Major Lloyd Graeme, M.P. (Secretary to Sir Auckland Geddes, National Service).

After the Inquiry was over, and Lady Rhondda's evidence was made public, the action of Miss Strachey, and the Women's Service Bureau became known.

The name of the Bishop of Kensington was mentioned as one of those on the Committee who had insisted on my removal. I do not know the Bishop of Kensington and I felt unable to believe that he could have taken such drastic action without enquiry. I was advised to approach him, and on doing so I was assured that he had never heard of the matter, and had not even realised that he had given his name in the early days of the War to Miss Strachey's Committee.

It appears that Sir Auckland Geddes after receiving Lady Rhondda's grave statement, saw Major Baird on or about August 19th, and informed him of its purport, and showed him the draft of the detailed communication, dated August 19th, which Sir A. Geddes had written to Lord Weir. *There is no doubt that Lord Weir received this letter, but both the original and the copy were stated by Lord Weir and Sir Auckland Geddes to have been mislaid by the Air Ministry and also by the Ministry of National Service. This document, which might have thrown fresh light on the matter, was not produced in Court.*

The following extract from Major Baird's evidence shows that this letter contained information of the most serious character :—

"Mr. Rigby Swift : The next matter I want to ask you about is a communication between Sir Auckland Geddes and Lord Weir. Do you remember going to see Sir Auckland Geddes about the 19th August ?

"Major Baird : Yes, distinctly.

.....

"Mr. Rigby Swift : Whilst you were with him did he tell you something about the Women's Royal Air Force ?

"Major Baird : . . . He proceeded to tell me **that he felt** a considerable amount of anxiety with regard to the Women's Section, and he went with considerable detail into the grounds for his anxiety. **He said he was writing a letter to Lord Weir in which he would explain the situation fully, and when I subsequently saw Lord Weir, I told him of this conversation, and also that Sir Auckland Geddes had told me a letter was coming over to him, setting forth the whole matter in detail.**

.....

"Mr. Rigby Swift : **Have you seen the draft of the letter?**

"Major Baird : **I have.**"

In reply to my Counsel, Major Baird said :—

"Mr. Hawke : **After you went with Sir Auckland Geddes into the grounds for his anxiety in detail, you went and told Lord Weir something? What did you tell Lord Weir?**

"Major Baird : I gave him the best account I could of the conversation I had had with Sir Auckland Geddes . . . **Indeed, I could not trust myself to elaborate a subject of so much importance. I preferred that Lord Weir should wait till he received the details in writing. It was far too important.** I merely told him I had had the conversation, and gave him a general account of what had passed.

"Earl of Denbigh : And he received the further details after your interview with him ?

"Major Baird : **He received the letter, the draft of which has been mentioned?**

"Earl of Denbigh : **That is the letter which you have not been able to find?**

"Major Baird : **The letter itself I understand is not found ; but the letter, I understand, was received by Lord Weir.**"

It appears from Sir Auckland Geddes' evidence that he relied on Lady Rhondda's Report when he decided to insist on my dismissal.

"Mr. Hawke: Was it solely on Lady Rhondda's Report that as a result that you wrote this? . . . It was Lady Rhondda's Report you got as the result of rumours and talk you heard about the camps?

"Sir Auckland Geddes: I asked Lady Rhondda to enquire and find out what the position in the Camps was, and what the position in regard to the organisation was, in detail.

"Mr. Hawke: May I put it shortly. It may help you. **Was Lady Rhondda's Report the only written Report that you ever had, so far as you remember?**

"Sir Auckland Geddes: **The only written Report.**"

Questioned by the Counsel for the Air Ministry, he replied as follows:—

"Mr. Rigby Swift: **On the 19th August did you draft a communication which was to be sent to the Minister of Air?**

"Sir Auckland Geddes: **Yes.**

"Mr. Rigby Swift: **In fact, I think it never was sent signed by you as an official document?**

"Sir Auckland Geddes: **That is correct.**

"Mr. Rigby Swift: **But Lord Weir has told us that its purport was brought to his notice.**

"Sir Auckland Geddes: **Yes, through Major Baird, who was at that time, his Parliamentary Secretary.**

In spite of the fact that the evidence shows that Lady Rhondda's Report, which she wrote on August 19th (after seeing Dame K. Furse, Mrs. Beatty, Miss K. Andrew, and Miss Strachey), was the subject of a conversation between Sir Auckland Geddes and Major J. L. Baird, the serious purport of which was immediately communicated by Major Baird to Lord Weir, and supplemented by a letter dated August 19th, from Sir Auckland Geddes to Lord Weir, their Lordships, in the Report, give as their considered opinion that Lady Rhondda's Report "played no part in determining Lord Weir's action." Though it is possible that Lord Weir had not actually seen her Report, which, it appeared, was not forwarded to him until August 26th (two days before my dismissal), *there is no doubt from the evidence that he*

was made aware of its contents by Major Baird and by Sir Auckland Geddes' letter on August 19th.

"Mr. Hawke: Now I want to ask you this. I suppose this intimation or letter, whatever its form may have been, may have influenced your mind?

"Lord Weir: I say that that letter brought very sharply up in front of me a situation about one of my Departments—nothing more than that.

"Mr. Hawke: Then you had this on the 25th August, bringing the situation actually before your mind?

"Lord Weir: Yes.

"Mr. Hawke: Possibly influencing your mind. I do not know what you would say to that. You had no influence from Lady Rhondda?

"Lord Weir: No.*

"Mr. Hawke: None from Miss Andrew; none from anyone else?

"Lord Weir: No."*

.....

In his evidence Lord Weir admitted that he had seen Lady Rhondda and Miss Strachey, and the letter he wrote to Sir A. Geddes after their visit, was read in Court.

"Mr. Rigby Swift: Before you answered that letter from Sir Auckland Geddes, did you hear anything about Lady Rhondda's Report?

"Lord Weir: I believe I did, because I got a message sent to me from Sir Auckland Geddes or conveyed to me by Sir Auckland Geddes through Major Baird, our Financial Secretary, who had seen Sir Auckland Geddes in connection with this matter prior to this letter.

"Mr. Rigby Swift: **Then Major Baird told you something?**

"Lord Weir: **He conveyed to me practically what was here, and, in addition, informed me that Lady Rhondda had made a bad Report about the Women's Royal Air Force.**

"Mr. Rigby Swift: Did you see Lady Rhondda's Report yourself?

"Lord Weir: I did not see Lady Rhondda's Report till Monday.

* In making this reply, Lord Weir must have forgotten his speech in the House of Lords and the Air Ministry's Statement of Case, in which it is admitted that he was directly influenced by them (*see* pages 246, 261).

"Mr. Rigby Swift: On Monday, the 26th, did you see Lady Rhondda?

"Lord Weir: Yes.

"Mr. Rigby Swift: And did you write on the evening of that day to Sir Auckland Geddes?

"Lord Weir: Yes.

"Mr. Rigby Swift: Now have you a copy of your letter that you wrote?

"Lord Weir: Yes.

"Mr. Rigby Swift: Is it this? :—

Strictly Confidential.

'Air Ministry,
'Strand, W.C. 2.
26th August, 1918.

'Dear Geddes,

'Many thanks for sending Lady Rhondda and Miss Strachey to-day to see me *re* the W.R.A.F.

'Over the week-end I made up my mind to supersede Miss Violet Pennant, and she will be told of this to-morrow. As you know, General Brancker has now become Master-General of Personnel, and I have asked him to arrange a meeting on Saturday here with Dame K. Furse and Mrs. Leach, as I want them to help us in straightening out matters and obtaining a good new Commandant. After we get this settled, progress can then be made.

Yours sincerely,

(*Signed*) WEIR.'

"Mr. Rigby Swift: Is that the letter you wrote?

"Lord Weir: Yes."

In the Report of the House of Lords Committee, their Lordships state—

"To say that Lord Weir was influenced by Sir Auckland Geddes seems to us to fall short of the mark. He was much more than influenced. He was practically compelled."

In view of Lady Rhondda's admitted responsibility in setting Sir A. Geddes in action, and in the interview she had with General Brancker, when it will be remembered I was hidden away by one of the Staff Officers, so as not to be seen, it seems difficult to understand why Lady Rhondda assured me shortly after my dismissal,

that she knew nothing whatever about the matter, and was quite unaware what had caused the Air Ministry to take this step (*see* pages 167-168).

It will be remembered that Lady Rhondda continued to deny all knowledge of the affair until just after the White Paper was published, in which her Report was included. She then wrote to *The Times*, the letter quoted on page 168.

During the course of her evidence, Lady Rhondda appears to have forgotten this letter, as when questioned as to whether she had brought any influence to bear, she replied as follows :—

"Mr. Barrington Ward : Have you ever been a party to, or privy to, any intrigue of any kind, directed against Miss Douglas-Pennant ?

"Lady Rhondda : No, I have not.

"Mr. Barrington Ward : Either to oust her from her office, or to do her any other injury of any kind ?

"Lady Rhondda : No.

.....

"Mr. Barrington Ward [reading from Miss Douglas-Pennant's Statement of Case] : The Secretary of State for the Royal Air Force . . . without reference to Major-General Sir Godfrey Paine, ordered her dismissal upon the recommendation and under the direct or indirect influence of certain persons outside the Air Force, among such persons being Sir Auckland Geddes, Dame K. Furse, Lady Rhondda, and Miss Andrew. Now, you heard me read that passage ?

"Lady Rhondda : Yes.

"Mr. Barrington Ward : **Is there a word of truth in the suggestion there made against you?**

"Lady Rhondda : **No, there is not.**

"Mr. Barrington Ward : **That you either directly or indirectly influenced either of these persons, the Secretary of State, or Major-General Brancker, to order Miss Douglas-Pennant's dismissal ?**

"Lady Rhondda : **No, that is quite wrong.**

.....

"Mr. Barrington Ward : Have you always acted in a perfectly straightforward manner towards her ?

"Lady Rhondda: Yes, perfectly straightforward. I object to that insinuation."

Their Lordships made no attempt to discover how far Miss P. Strachey—who had no first-hand knowledge of the W.R.A.F. and had never met me—was qualified to judge, but gave their decision as follows :—

"On August 26th Lord Weir verbally instructed General Brancker to supersede Miss Douglas-Pennant. Before he gave those instructions, Lord Weir thinks he saw Lady Rhondda.

"In this state of facts we think it quite clear that the change of front between the 17th and the 28th August was due and solely due to Sir Auckland Geddes' letter or draft of August 19th. Lord Weir was vacillating; he does not seem to have known his own mind in the matter until he was brought up short by the plain intimation from Sir Auckland Geddes, as Minister of National Service, that the existing state of things must not continue. So far as it was competent, if at all, to one Minister to dictate to another, Sir Auckland was dictating to Lord Weir that he must act and at once. And he did. To say that Lord Weir was influenced by Sir Auckland seems to us to fall far short of the mark. He was much more than influenced, he was practically compelled. But to say that in so doing Sir Auckland was joining in an intrigue or acting from any improper motive is, in our judgment, so absolutely remote from the truth as to be ridiculous.

"We find that in acting as he did Lord Weir was free from improper influence altogether. As Minister of Air Service, it was wholly and solely for him, if he acted honestly, to supersede Miss Douglas-Pennant, if, in his judgment, it was in the interests of the public service so to do. In our judgment he acted honestly and superseded her because, in the interest of the public service, he thought it was right so to do. This is the sum of the whole matter.

.....

"As to Lady Rhondda. She was Chief Controller of Women's recruiting at the Ministry of National Service, and, as such, owed to Sir Auckland Geddes, as Minister of National Service, the duty to advise him as to women's corps as a whole. On or about the 13th August, Miss Strachey (Head of the Women's Service Bureau—a voluntary organisation in Victoria Street) came to see her about the W.R.A.F., and as the result of what she said, Lady Rhondda went to see Sir Auckland Geddes, and then by Sir Auckland's request, to see Lord Weir. On the 16th August Lady Rhondda also saw Dame Katherine Furse and some other people. By Sir Auckland's request she then prepared

a report upon some nine different organisations, one of which was the W.R.A.F. A copy is to be found in the Appendix.* This report was dated and signed on August 22nd. It played no part in determining Lord Weir's action. He had made up his mind on Sunday, August 25th, and did not see the report until after he had taken his decision and acted upon it.

"In cross-examination, Mr. Hawke put it to Lady Rhondda that the Air Ministry, by their statement of case, had admitted (as they had) that Lord Weir, in coming to his decision, was influenced by, amongst other persons, Lady Rhondda. But Lady Rhondda, of course, had nothing to do with admissions made by the Air Ministry, and, inasmuch as Lord Weir did not see either Lady Rhondda or her report until after he had determined upon the course he would take, the admission by the Air Ministry seems at any rate to require qualifications.

"Miss Douglas-Pennant, in par. 5 of her case, states as follows :—

> 'The Secretary of State for the Royal Air Force and/or Major-General W. S. Brancker, without reference to Major-General Sir Godfrey Paine, ordered her dismissal upon the recommendation and under the direct or indirect influence of certain persons outside the Air Force, among such persons being Sir Auckland Geddes, Dame Katherine Furse, Lady Rhondda, and Miss Andrew.'

"In her evidence, Miss Douglas-Pennant says :—

> 'I took for granted that Lady Rhondda was everything that one would wish in the way of straightforwardness, but I regret to say that over this business I am obliged to say that I have not found her straight.'

and adds that 'she certainly tried to get rid of me without any justification.'

"In our opinion there is no ground for any of those charges. Lady Rhondda was acting perfectly bona fide in discharge of her duty to Sir Auckland Geddes in giving him help in dealing with an unsatisfactory state of affairs."

One of the most remarkable features of this whole case is the secrecy which was maintained throughout. General Paine, the head of the Department, was in office during the time that Sir Auckland Geddes and Lady Rhondda made these statements reflecting so seriously on his Department. He was the senior member of the Air Council, but he was neither consulted nor

* Appendix to House of Lords Inquiry, also see page 360.

informed. I, the accused person, was not allowed to know that these statements had been made, and I was thus prevented from refuting them, and from showing that they were without foundation. If General Paine had known of these accusations he could have proved beyond dispute that Lady Rhondda's statements were untrue. *The question of my dismissal was never referred to the Air Council for decision, though the Regulations lay down that all cases of discharge of officers and rank and file must be submitted for approval before action is taken.*

In view of Lady Rhondda's Report, and the urgency of the man-power question, it is not to be wondered at that Sir Auckland Geddes insisted that immediate steps must be taken to remedy the serious state of affairs which she assured him existed, especially having regard to the "important allegations" against me, the nature of which I have never been permitted to know.

Lord Weir must have been fully aware of the inaccuracies in Lady Rhondda's Report. He also knew that the recruiting arrangements for the W.R.A.F., which Sir Auckland Geddes had criticised severely, were not under my jurisdiction, but were dealt with by the Department of the Director of Manning in conjunction with the Ministry of Labour. Lord Weir cannot have forgotten that he himself had ordered the postponement of the W.R.A.F. recruiting campaign until October 1st, as the Equipment Department had failed to provide the necessary accommodation and equipment for housing the recruits. Lord Weir was equally aware that the shortage of Officers in the W.R.A.F. was entirely due to the fact that the Air Ministry had not supplied the Training Centre so urgently needed It is difficult to believe that Lord Weir, who hardly knew me, could make me the scapegoat for the deficiencies of other Departments in defiance of the elements of justice. The fact remains, however, that after receiving Sir Auckland Geddes' letter, he ordered my instant dismissal although he had agreed only a few days earlier that I must be refused permission to resign.

In his evidence Lord Weir made the astonishing admission that after he had seen Major Baird and received Sir Auckland Geddes' letter he did not make any enquiries but at once decided to dismiss me.

This action seems all the more incomprehensible in view of the assurance given on behalf of the Government by Mr. Winston Churchill in the House of Commons and by Lord Londonderry in the House of Lords, that Lord Weir had enquired most fully into the matter, and had taken every possible advice upon the subject. To quote from Lord Londonderry's words, February 27th, 1919—

> "Miss Violet Douglas-Pennant was superseded by the Secretary of State and not by General Brancker or any subordinate official. This is a matter which is the sole responsibility of the head of the Department, **who as we know takes every possible advice upon the subject. He considers it with the most close personal contact he can possibly achieve,** and on his own volition and responsibility he carries out the details of his administration. . . . **The claim of anyone to occupy a high position in this country depends on his capacity to select the right individuals to act as subordinates to himself."**

Lord Weir as an experienced business man must have been fully aware of the serious consequences and life-long stigma which attaches to instant dismissal, especially dismissal from a Force from which it is impossible to resign without permission.

When pressed by my Counsel to explain why he had not given me any opportunity of defending myself, Lord Weir confirmed the statement he had previously made in the House of Lords, *i.e.*—

> **"I consulted no one . . . . . It may be alleged that I should have instituted some special enquiry before acting in that manner. I can only say that it is foreign to my methods of working.**
>
> .....
>
> "Mr. Hawke: **Of course you did not ask Miss Douglas-Pennant?**
>
> "Lord Weir: **No, I did not.**
>
> "Mr. Hawke: Then you discharged her?
>
> "Lord Weir: Yes.
>
> "Mr. Hawke: What was your reason?

"Lord Weir: Because I came to the conclusion it was the right thing for me to do.

"Mr. Hawke: I did it because I did?

"Lord Weir: No, that is not so. I was faced with the situation, and that is the way I dealt with the situation.

.....

"Mr. Hawke: **She had been refused the right of resignation and seeing that there were no definite charges implicating her personally is it fair to supersede her without making any enquiry?**

"Lord Weir: I consider I did the right thing.

.....

"Mr. Hawke: When you come in after days to consider whether it is true that the W.R.A.F. organisation was bad have you ever paused to think who it was who had taken the only steps that were taken for the improvement of the conditions as to getting Officers?

"Lord Weir: No.

"Mr. Hawke: But you discharged her because conditions were bad, and you do not seem to have asked yourself any questions as to the reasons why conditions were bad. . . . She was superseded not for any defects, not for any failure to co-operate with other people, not for any unpopularity, but because you thought you ought to have somebody else?

"Lord Weir: I think that is not the right way to put it at all."

Lord Weir stated in his evidence that he considered that it was in the interests of the Force to make a change, and that it was his wish to appoint Lady Rhondda as Commandant. It was owing to the fact that she had just succeeded her father, Lord Rhondda, that she was unable to accept the post (*see* page 152).

I may be permitted to point out that if Lord Weir had merely wished to make a change he could have allowed me to resign when I asked permission to do so ten days earlier, or he could have given me the month's notice required under the Regulations to terminate my service. On the other hand, if he had considered it desirable to retain me in a more subordinate position he could have moved me to a junior post in the Force. Nothing would have been simpler—no stigma would have been attached, and under the Regulations I should have had no grounds for complaint. That Lord Weir did not select any of these

obvious alternatives in order to deal with the situation leaves it to be assumed that he must have received some very grave intimation which convinced him that it was his duty to discredit me publicly and make it impossible for me to hold any position of responsibility in the future.

When questioned regarding the appointment of my successor, Lord Weir replied as follows :—

"Mr. Hawke : Now I want you just to tell me this—after she went there were six ladies' names given to you as likely to succeed her ?

"Lord Weir : I think probably more than six.

"Mr. Hawke : And there was one lady whom you said you personally desired ?

"Lord Weir : Yes.

"Mr. Hawke : And who could not come ?

"Lord Weir : Yes.

.....

"Mr. Hawke : . . . Give me first the lady that you wanted, because that comes first in your speech ?

"Lord Weir : Is it necessary for me to reply to that question?

.....

"Mr. Hawke : Will you tell me ?

"Lord Weir : Yes, Lady Rhondda herself.

"Mr. Hawke : That is the one you wanted yourself ?

"Lord Weir : Yes."

My Counsel also questioned Lord Weir as to the Air Ministry's statement that his decision to dismiss me was influenced by Lady Rhondda and Miss Andrew. From Lord Weir's replies it appears that he had forgotten that in the Debate in the House of Lords (July 30th, 1918), he declared that Miss Andrew's criticisms of my organisation had aroused his misgivings (*see* page 246). A further indication of the reliance Lord Weir placed on Miss Andrew's opinion is shown by the fact that Lord Londonderry quoted an extract from the correspondence which had passed between her and Lord Weir behind my back during the time she was in the W.R.A.F. (*see* page 234).

It will be noted that Lord Weir in his evidence appeared to repudiate the Air Ministry's Statement of Case. This seems all the more singular as the statement in question had been drawn up by the Crown Solicitor, to show justification for Lord Weir's action in dismissing me. My Counsel reminded Lord Weir of Mr. Rigby Swift's statement to the Court that his, *i.e.*, Lord Weir's, views of Miss Douglas-Pennant's suitability were changed by

"Sir Auckland Geddes, and the enquiries made by Lady Rhondda, and what General Brancker had ascertained, as to the position, all of which were before Lord Weir."

"Mr. Hawke: Is that true or not true?

"Lord Weir: **It is not true.**

"Mr. Hawke: Is it true or untrue?

"Lord Weir: It is untrue; it is not the case.

.....

"Mr. Hawke: **I am suggesting to you that this case, the case of the Department, over which you presided is every word of it untrue?**

"Lord Weir: **I am giving you my case—not the Air Ministry's case. I am telling you the facts. I have nothing to do with these questions."**

.....

"Mr. Hawke: Now you have told me that you were not influenced by Miss Andrew or Lady Rhondda. Do you understand then why it is admitted by the Air Board that you were so influenced?

"Lord Weir: No.

"Mr. Hawke: Now let me read you this. This is the Air Board's reply in this case:—

'It is admitted that in coming to this decision the then Secretary of State was influenced, among other matters, by the opinions expressed by Sir Auckland Geddes, as Minister of National Service, Lady Rhondda, as head of the Women's Branch of the Ministry of National Service, and Miss Andrew.'

"Lord Weir: I cannot help that.

"Mr. Hawke: **That is not a true statement.**

"Lord Weir: I cannot help that.

"Mr. Hawke: Parliamentary, perhaps? (*see* page 255).

"Lord Weir: **I do not know anything about it.**

"Mr. Hawke: How long have you been asked to give information to the Air Board on the subject of this Inquiry. I suppose from the first?

"Lord Weir: As a matter of fact, I had no official letters or communications from the Air Board at all about it.

"Mr. Hawke: That hardly answers the question put to you. You gather what the question was. The question was, how long have you been consulted by the Air Board with regard to the matters of this Inquiry?

"Lord Weir: Probably at times since they started to make arrangements for the Inquiry.

.....

"Mr. Hawke: This is the statement made by the Air Board on the 20th September, 1919, and it is that **it is admitted you were influenced by Lady Rhondda and Miss Andrew.** As a matter of curiosity, have you ever seen the reply of the Air Board in this case?

"Lord Weir: I do not think, as a matter of fact, I have ever seen the final reply.

"Mr. Hawke: Are you sure you have not?

"Lord Weir: I saw an early reply.

"Mr. Hawke: The earlier reply?

"Lord Weir: The early one.

"Mr. Hawke: Perhaps that was altered. Did you make some suggestions for its alteration?

"Lord Weir: It is possible I did.

"Mr. Hawke: Then that may account for its form you see; because this is their considered answer?

"Lord Weir: I cannot explain that. **I do not know about their official paper. I have had very little to do with this case.**"

General Brancker's evidence though more assured and definite was highly inconsistent with Lord Weir's statement.

Their Lordships in their Report comment on this in the following terms—

> "Another ground of regret is that the reasons assigned by General Brancker at the time, and subsequently by Lord Weir, are not always consistent with each other."

General Brancker in his written Statement of Case endeavoured to make clear that I had been removed

on a decision of the Air Council. To quote from his Statement—

> **"At a meeting of the Air Council held on or about the 27th August, he (General Brancker) attended. It was decided that Miss Douglas-Pennant should be relieved of her duties, and that some other person should be appointed Commandant."**

My Counsel pointed out that *no meeting of the Air Council had in fact taken place until August 30th, two days after he had dismissed me (August 28th). The Minutes of the Air Council prove that no meeting was held at which this matter was discussed until August 30th, 1918, when the following entry in the Minutes indicate that General Brancker merely reported the matter as an accomplished fact.*

> " 46th Meeting of the Air Council (Friday, 30th August, 1918).
>
> " Incidentally General Brancker mentioned that he had seen Miss Douglas-Pennant, the retiring Commandant of the W.R.A.F. She had then seemed fully aware of the reasons for which her services had been dispensed with, and had subsequently written a letter asking for further details."

If, as General Brancker alleges, I "seemed fully aware of the reasons" for my dismissal, which I deny, it seems somewhat inconsistent that I should write immediately afterwards to ask for further details.

My Counsel pointed out that not only in his Statement of Case, but also in the draft letter already referred to, which was never sent (*see* page 349), General Brancker had written to inform me that "*The Air Council has no further use for your services*" and he added that as he had satisfied himself that I would never be *persona grata* with Dame K. Furse and the head of the Q.M.A.A.C. he had, to quote his words—

> **"been obliged reluctantly to place the whole matter before the Air Council for their decision."**

My Counsel invited General Brancker to explain why he had asserted both in this letter and in his Statement of Case that he had submitted the matter to the Air Council for their decision when as a matter of fact he had not done so. From General Brancker's evidence it

will be seen that he was unable to give a satisfactory reply.

"Mr. Hawke [reading from General Brancker's Statement of Case]: 'On the 28th August General Brancker in accordance with the decision of the Air Council'—This decision of the Air Council is always cropping up.

"General Brancker: Yes.

"Mr. Hawke: And by the instructions received from Lord Weir communicated to Miss Douglas-Pennant, the decision to supersede her?

"General Brancker: Yes. . . . .

"Mr. Hawke: Let us see what you put on paper about it yourself. This is your letter of the 30th August:—

'Dear Miss Douglas-Pennant,

'In continuation of our conversation and in reply to your letter of 29th August, **I write to inform you that the Air Council regret that they have no further use for your services.'**

That does not mean supersede, does it?

"General Brancker: Well, if you have no further use for a person's services you have got to supersede them, have you not? I do not see any difference.

"Mr. Hawke: **Is that all it means when His Majesty has no further use for your services?**

"General Brancker: **There you beat me, I do not know.** It was my interpretation of it.

"Mr. Hawke: **You really do not know that, and how long have you been a soldier?**

"General Brancker: 23 years. . . . . As I have said before, these facts are true, but in a sense they are misleading. My position was this——

"Mr. Hawke: Had you ever put it before the Air Council?

"General Brancker: It had been before the Air Council on the 30th August after Lord Weir's decision.

"Mr. Hawke: For their decision?

"General Brancker: Well, they were in a position——

"Mr. Hawke: Listen, sir, you can hardly have wished to say: 'I had therefore reluctantly to place the whole matter before the Air Council for their decision?'

"General Brancker: Yes.

"Mr. Hawke: She had been dismissed two days?

"General Brancker: May I save time by explaining this letter?

"Mr. Hawke: I would much rather you answered the question. I want to see how much of this is true. Did you at any time put the matter before the Air Council for their decision?

"General Brancker: No, but Lord Weir had decided, and it was put before the Air Council on the morning of the 30th."

In reply to his own Counsel, who endeavoured to help him out of the difficulty, General Brancker owned that the letter in question—

"was an effort to put a rather confused situation into official language. Actually, the facts stated in this letter are absolutely true, but I admit that in sequence it is a somewhat misleading description of what happened."

General Brancker in his evidence gave the impression that General Paine had given him to understand that he considered me unsuitable for the post of Commandant. I have already quoted General Paine's evidence which shows that there was no truth in this statement.

"Mr. Hawke: When General Paine came back and heard of Miss Douglas-Pennant's dismissal, did he express himself rather strongly about it?

"General Brancker: I should think he probably did. He always expressed himself strongly.

"Mr. Hawke: I am going to use what I am told is Sir Godfrey Paine's language. Did he say: 'What the Hell do you mean by getting rid of that good woman?'

"General Brancker: No, he did not.

"Mr. Hawke: Did he say to you, referring to the same part of the universe: 'How are you going to get on without her?'

"General Brancker: No, he did not.

"Mr. Hawke: Nothing to that effect?

"General Brancker: Nothing to that effect. I can tell you what he did say. He said: 'I think she has been dismissed like a housemaid'; and secondly, he said: 'If only you had let her go on she would have resigned.'

"Chairman [Lord Wrenbury]: He had some experience of Miss Douglas-Pennant.

"Mr. Hawke: Did you realise that the lady's wish was to resign?

"General Brancker: No, I did not. I never heard of her resignation."

In view of Lord Wrenbury's comment, I may be permitted to point out that there is no doubt that General Paine fully understood and appreciated my reasons in feeling that, much as I disliked having to give up my work in war-time, I was not justified in continuing to accept responsibility unless I was permitted to remedy bad conditions. These matters could have been easily remedied if I had been allowed the necessary supplies and equipment to establish the W.R.A.F.

The idea seems to have widely prevailed that Lord Weir held a full Inquiry before my dismissal. A relative of Sir Auckland Geddes, who succeeded Lady F. Balfour as the Chairman of the Women's Service Bureau (of which Miss Strachey is Secretary) insisted that this was the case, and went so far as to inform me many months later that it was well known that I was suffering from acute delusions when I declared that no such Inquiry had been held. She added that it was useless for me to attempt to make reasonable people believe that a responsible Minister of the Crown would dismiss an official without any Inquiry or any opportunity being given for hearing and refuting the charges.

I protest that in my case I have not received elementary justice, and that the action of Lord Weir and Lady Rhondda throughout has been against every tradition of fair play and honourable dealing. To quote the words of Lord Ampthill during his speech in the House of Lords on July 30th, 1919:—

"**The dismissal was an altogether unprecedented action, and an act of so unusual, so arbitrary a nature, that it can only have been conceived in a very unwholesome atmosphere.** It is idle to pretend that an act of that kind was merely an error of judgment on the part of the Minister. **The principle that nobody may be punished unless first tried and condemned is known to every man, woman, and child in this country.** Any child could have set Lord Weir right on that point. What we want to know, therefore, is what motives were at work; for motives and strong motives

there must have been which actuated Lord Weir to risk taking such very unusual action."

In my efforts to place the W.R.A.F. on a sound and efficient footing, and to ensure that the posts of Officers were filled by women who would be a credit to the Corps, I had believed throughout that I had the full sympathy and confidence of National Service.

Up to the moment of my dismissal I claim that I had been invariably regarded as a person of reliability and untarnished reputation. The decision of Sir Auckland Geddes and Lord Weir, acting on Lady Rhondda's advice, has resulted in my being suddenly branded as one alleged to be guilty of that disgraceful conduct which alone merits instant dismissal. That it should have been considered necessary to order the immediate removal of the Commandant of a large women's Force in the midst of most pressing work and engagements—before even a successor could be appointed—left no doubt in the minds of the thousands of men and women in the Services, who did not know me, as to the nature of the charges which had called for such prompt measures. There could be only one reason, and one reason alone, for this drastic action.

For many months after my dismissal I was subjected to abusive attacks on the telephone and by post, accusing me in scurrilous terms of disgraceful practices, and threatening that further harm would be done to me if I continued to urge for an Inquiry.

The official statement previously issued by the Air Minister, General Seely, to the National Political League (*see* page 189) had owing to its significant wording caused much comment, and had given colour to the reports spread broadcast that I was a disreputable character and a danger to the women.

It was not until nearly a year after my dismissal that Lord Peel, in the House of Lords, on behalf of the Government, stated that there was nothing against my personal character. To quote his words—

"Her character is unassailed and unassailable. It stands far above any detraction that any man could ever suggest or

bring against her. . . . It is even an insult to the lady to suggest that such a matter could be discussed."

Unfortunately, owing to the fact that few people read the report of Debates in the House of Lords, this tardy attempt at reparation had little practical value.

In spite of many years' work and experience I now find myself debarred from any further share in public work. A few months ago I offered my services as a volunteer when help was required at a moment of great pressure of work. They were accepted, but when my identity became known at the end of the day, I was immediately requested to leave, to the astonishment of my fellow workers, on the ground that it would be impossible to associate with me.

CHAPTER XXX.

The Red Herring.

While skilfully avoiding any challenge as to the grounds for my dismissal, the Air Ministry drew a red herring across the trail in order to convince the Court that I was an irresponsible and ill-balanced woman suffering from "hallucinations run mad," and "eager to find evil which did not exist." It was part of the Air Ministry's case to prove that I had no grounds for the statement for which I have been so severely censured, *i.e.*, that "grave scandals existed in certain Air Force camps." The Air Ministry, without doubt, was aware of the true state of affairs.

It would have been difficult to expect that these conditions could have been otherwise when it is remembered that the Air Ministry for many weeks past had placed the welfare of thousands of women in the inexperienced hands of junior Air Force officers, and had permitted such a serious state of chaos and inefficiency to exist.

I strongly protest against the position into which I was unjustly forced during the Inquiry. I have been placed in the light of one who did not hesitate to bring serious accusations against people the Air Ministry regarded as worthy of the responsible posts entrusted to them. It has been repeatedly stated that my allegations were not only unsupported by any evidence, but were the deliberate invention of an evil and unscrupulous mind. On the contrary, I had plenty of witnesses, and, as I have already pointed out, my solicitor, when questioned on this point by the members of a Committee set up to urge for an Inquiry, replied, as the Minutes of the Committee show, "*we have ample evidence on every point raised*" (*see* page 239).

As only one of my witnesses was called to give evidence regarding the state of affairs in certain camps, it is not to be wondered at that their Lordships in the

Report draw adverse attention to the significance that I did not call either Mrs. Clifford Beckett and Mrs. Digby Read, though I had stated in my evidence that I intended doing so, as they were prepared to confirm my allegations regarding the irregularities.

These witnesses were actually in Court waiting to be called; others were ready to come at a moment's notice. Their statements had been taken down by my solicitor. The fact that these witnesses were not called is not due to any fault of mine.

Mrs. Digby Read, a lady with great experience of welfare organization, had been doing voluntary work during the war, which brought her constantly into touch with the W.R.A.F. and the Q.M.A.A.C. That she was fully aware of the undesirable conditions existing in certain camps and that she was anxious to corroborate my statements, is shown in the following letter:—

"195, Iffley Road,
"Oxford,
"September 17th, 1918.

"Dear Miss Douglas-Pennant,

"I feel I must send you these few lines just to tell you how full of sympathy my heart is for you in the hateful and cruel experience that you have been enduring—and also to say that if you want me to give any evidence in my small way, I will fearlessly speak my mind in all truth!

"Yours v. sincerely,

"(*Signed*) MARGARET M. READ."

Mrs. Beckett could also have substantiated my statements from her experience as an Inspector attached to one of the Air Force Areas. There is ample evidence to show that if my witnesses had been brought forward they would have proved my allegations.

I am prepared to stand by every word I have said regarding these undesirable conditions. Those who know the circumstances would agree that there has been no exaggeration on my part. They were, to say the least of it, disgraceful. To quote the words of a commanding officer, who was willing to give evidence at the Inquiry, "the lack of discipline, and the state of affairs which

existed in some of the camps, were a disgrace to a civilized country."

The Air Force Depot at Hurst Park came prominently before the House of Lords Inquiry.

The 500 women motor drivers in training there, the hostels in which they were accommodated, and all the arrangements concerning their health and welfare, were in the hands of Lieut.-Colonel Sam Janson, a Temporary Officer, who as a chauffeur-mechanic before the war, was doubtless fully competent to deal with the mechanical side of his duties. His arrangements, however, at Hurst Park, proved either that he had no conception of what was required or was unable to ensure the welfare and discipline of the large number of women under his control.

As I have already related (*see* page 8), when I first visited Hurst Park, I found the Hostels in great disorder, and for some unknown reason, the O.C., Lieut.-Colonel Janson, whom I had never seen, constantly avoided meeting me to discuss how best to amend matters. I called on him several times as a matter of courtesy, and more than once endeavoured to make an appointment to meet him. I am credibly informed that though he was actually on the premises, he gave orders that I was to be told that he was absent from the Camp. This attitude on the part of a total stranger seemed to be inexplicable at the time, and it was not until later that I became aware that from the outset I had been seriously misrepresented to the W.R.A.F. Officers and rank and file.

The following letter from Colonel Janson to Colonel Bersey, dated 19th May, 1918, only five days after I arrived at the Air Ministry, throws a curious light on Colonel Janson's attitude towards the Commandant, W.R.A.F., who was not only his Senior, but who was obliged in the course of her duty to visit the Hostels of which she was in charge, and over which he had no jurisdiction.

> "In your absence I spoke to Captain Ingram yesterday in respect of the Commandant of the Women's Royal Air Force coming down at 7 o'clock in the evening without any advice of

her visit to inspect Hostels. She did not report here to me, nor, in fact, did she come to see me before she left. I ask that she might be made acquainted with the appropriate form of procedure. Yesterday Major Cockburn came down, and no advice of his visit was received, and the Adjutant was here until 6 p.m. To put it frankly, neither you nor I have time for this sort of thing. All I ask of you is to please instruct your people and officers of the W.R.A.F. that **before inspecting these Hostels and all the people in them on the strength of this depot, and before anyone goes into any place or interviews any person belonging to this depot, I should receive official notice 24 hours ahead, and whoever it is, to report to my office first. I feel sure you will do this."** *

As the Commandant, W.R.A.F., was held responsible for the welfare and discipline of the W.R.A.F. in the Hostels, it is obvious that Colonel Janson's stipulations and restrictions would have made it impossible for any reliable opinion to have been formed as to the true state of affairs.

On the occasion referred to in the letter, *i.e.*, my first visit to Hurst Park, I asked Colonel Bersey to tell Colonel Janson that I was coming to see the Hostels, and to arrange a meeting for me with him. I was assured that this had been arranged, but on calling at Colonel Janson's Orderly Room with the Hostel Administrator, I was informed that he and the Adjutant and other Senior Officers were absent.

It was soon after this that I was obliged to move the Hostel Administrator (*i.e.*, Senior W.R.A.F. Officer) to a less arduous post, and her place at Hurst Park was taken by Mrs. Kitto, who had lately transferred from the Q.M.A.A.C. When I visited the Hostels at the Depot, I invariably enquired carefully as to whether things were running smoothly—whether Mrs. Kitto had anything to report, and I gave her every opportunity of doing so. Her complaints, however, until a few days before my dismissal, were always personal ones. She mentioned that two of her Junior Officers, Miss Livesey and Miss Glubb, were over-riding her authority, and that Miss Livesey with Colonel Janson's concurrence,

* This letter was brought to the notice of their Lordships during the Inquiry.

was claiming equal rank with her own. It was after hearing this that I consulted Colonel Bersey, who told me that he knew nothing whatever about these two Junior Officers, and had never heard of them. He promised, however, that he would make full enquiries of Colonel Janson, and put a stop to any irregularities if they existed. He informed me later that he had ascertained that there was no truth whatever in Mrs. Kitto's statement that Miss Livesey called herself "Technical Administrator," which grade, Colonel Bersey agreed with me, did not exist under the Regulations.

In view of the following correspondence, of which I was unaware at the time, it is difficult to understand why Colonel Bersey should have informed me shortly afterwards that he had never heard of these Officers, nor of the matter regarding their irregular posting and pay—

Copy.

"To the O.C. No. 1 M.T. Depot, R.A.F.,
"Hurst Park.

"13th May, 1918.

"With reference to your——I have to inform you that the application for Miss Livesey for post as an Officer in the W.R.A.F. has been approved by the Medical and Selection Board, and will begin from April 1st. She has been posted to the unit under your command as Technical Superintendent graded for pay 8, at an annual salary of £150 and quarters.

"(*Signed*) W. C. BERSEY,
"Lieut.-Colonel."

Copy.

"No. 1 M.T. Depot, R.A.F.,
"Lieut.-Colonel Bersey,
"Air Board Office,
"Strand, W.C. 2.

"Dear Bersey,

"Sorry to have to trouble you again, but the postings of Miss Livesey and Miss Glubb are incorrect. You and I made a definite arrangement that Miss Livesey was to be graded for the purpose of pay and rank as equivalent to Hostel Administrator,

Grade 7, annual emolument £175 and quarters, and Miss Glubb as Technical Superintendent, Grade 8, £150 and quarters.

"Yours sincerely,

"Hurst Park. "S. JANSON."
"17.5.18."

On May 18th, Colonel Bersey wrote the following note to Colonel Janson :—

Copy. "Air Ministry, Strand,
"18th May, 1918.*

"Dear Janson,

"Miss Livesey has been appointed under Grade 7, at £175 and quarters, and Miss Glubb under Grade 8, at £150 and quarters.

"(*Signed*) W.C.B."

Their Lordships' attention was drawn to this correspondence and my Counsel pointed out that the appointment of Miss Glubb was also irregular.

Miss Glubb was entitled to the post of Assistant Technical Superintendent, Grade 9, pay £120 and quarters. A minute signed by Colonel Bersey's initials "W.C.B." gave her the higher rank of Grade 8, at £150 and quarters.

Some further irregularity seems to have taken place over the appointment of these two W.R.A.F. Officers. From the records it will be seen that they do not appear to have gone before the Medical Board or to have undergone the required three weeks' probationary training. In spite of the fact that they only came up before the Selection Board on May 2nd, 1918, their appointments to Hurst Park are initialled by Colonel Bersey as dating from April 1st, 1918.

Mrs. Kitto, the authorized Senior W.R.A.F. Officer at Hurst Park, held the rank of Hostel Administrator, Grade 7, pay £175 and quarters. This rank was reserved for Hostel Administrators alone, the highest rank for Women Technical Officers being—Technical Superintendent Grade 8, £150 and quarters; Assistant Technical Superintendent, Grade 9, £120 and quarters. On the strength of the irregular rank granted to them by Colonel Bersey

* This arrangement was made the day after my first visit to the W.R.A.F. at Hurst Park.

at the request of Colonel Janson, Miss Livesey and Miss Glubb had set up a rival Orderly Room in the Camp with Colonel Janson's permission, from which, I heard later, they issued instructions to the W.R.A.F. Motor Transport Drivers over the head of their authorised Senior Officer, Mrs. Kitto. There is also evidence to show that these two W.R.A.F. Technical Officers were drawing, not only unauthorised pay, but full subsistence allowance for board and lodging, for which officers living outside hostels were alone eligible. Both the officers in question were mobile—*i.e.*, accommodated in a hostel and in receipt of rations, and were, therefore, not entitled to these allowances.

It is clear from the above correspondence that Mrs. Kitto was justified in stating that her authority was overridden by her junior officers with the concurrence of Colonel Janson, the Commanding Officer. It is not to be wondered at that Mrs. Kitto was disheartened, and treated me with want of confidence. She was aware that I was held responsible for the appointment and posting of all W.R.A.F. officers, and doubtless believed that I had authorised these irregularities which made her position impossible.

There is no doubt that this unauthorised arrangement was one of the causes of the serious state of affairs which came to light later at Hurst Park, and which, in spite of the inference from the finding of the House of Lords' Committee, is too well-known to a large number of reliable men and women to be disputed.

Those who had the interests of the Service at heart will find it hard to understand how it could have been felt wise to set up a rival authority to that authorised by the Regulations, and to have placed the welfare of a large number of women (500) in the inexperienced hands of two junior W.R.A.F. officers. I was obliged to rely on Colonel Bersey for information in the matter. He was my liaison officer, and my only means of communication with the officer commanding the camp, so I was debarred from obtaining information from any other source.

When first I visited Hurst Park I found that in some of the Hostels there was no one in charge. Shortly after I became Commandant I was able, however, to ensure that each Hostel was under proper supervision. If the evidence of these Hostel officers had been heard during the Inquiry, they would have given the true version of the state of affairs which existed at Hurst Park, but over which Mrs. Kitto and they had no control, as they were entirely under the orders of the O.C.

As soon as I became Commandant, I asked Colonel Bersey to find out from the O.C. at Hurst Park what steps were taken to check absentees.

I had heard rumours that Junior Air Force officers occasionally ordered the girls out late at night after they were in bed. This seemed to me to be inadvisable except in an emergency, under orders from a senior officer.

I did not feel satisfied that where a large number of women drivers was concerned, it was possible for the Hostel Administrator to be certain that their absence at night was due to their being on duty, unless she was notified and an absentee book was kept where the cars were parked.

A letter was accordingly sent at my request by the Air Ministry to Colonel Janson, asking for this information, and this apparently gave rise to rumours that the Commandant was over-strict and interfering, and must be got rid of.

Up to that time, like many other people, I had heard vague tales of alleged indiscipline and of unsuitable conditions. Of the bad accommodation I had ample evidence. I could only report cases immediately and urge that prompt measure should be taken to remedy them. These matters were then passed on to the Equipment Department to deal with. So far as rumours of bad discipline and immorality in the W.R.A.F. were concerned I made every effort to trace them to their source. When challenged to produce facts those who had repeated these reports and vouched for their accuracy invariably referred me to an ever-elusive third person, who persistently evaded interrogation. Rightly or wrongly it appeared to me

to be a waste of time to carry to my senior officer these rumours apparently founded on idle and exaggerated gossip. I felt confident that much of this reckless talk would cease very shortly, as on obtaining the loan of a Training College on August 2nd, 1918, from the London County Council I had posted out a large number of women officers to supervise the hostels and the women working in the Air Force Camps.

The only definite complaint I had received was from the Controller of the Q.M.A.A.C. (Mrs. Burleigh Leach), shortly after I became Commandant. She told me that members of the W.R.A.F. were behaving in a most unruly manner at night-time in the Strand and Trafalgar Square, soliciting, obstructing, and generally disgracing themselves, and that, as they still wore Q.M.A.A.C. uniforms, they were dragging down the prestige of the Q.M.A.A.C. Mrs. Burleigh Leach told me that the Adjutant-General (General Macready) was very much annoyed, and that the Army Council was sending an official letter of complaint to the Air Ministry. I assured Mrs. Burleigh Leach that I would take every step to clear this matter up, and that I was determined that she should in no way be held to blame for alleged deficiencies of the W.R.A.F. I at once took steps to ensure that all W.R.A.F. in the London area wore badges to identify them as belonging to the Air Force. This order was carried out the next day. I reported the matter to General Paine. I made careful enquiry concerning the alleged misbehaviour of the W.R.A.F. and myself visited the Strand and Trafalgar Square several times at night in plain clothes. Neither the police nor any other responsible person had any complaints to make of the W.R.A.F. in that neighbourhood.

In the Report their Lordships censure me, however, as a person who, to quote their words, "*enters upon the scene in the character in her own opinion of the saviour of a position which she found in a desperate condition; in the character of one who was to sweep out the supposed Augean stable; eager to find evils which did not exist.*"

Far from this being the case I was anxious to concentrate on getting conditions promptly amended rather

than to expose irregularities and "wash dirty linen in public." That General Paine agreed with my view is shown by the following extract from his evidence :—

"Lord Wrenbury : Her view was that if she had good reasons to believe or a suspicion that immorality was going on at Hurst Park she could not go to Sir Godfrey Paine about it till she knew something. Is not that the position ?

"General Paine : Well, my Lord, it is no good going to anybody with vague rumours. You cannot do anything on rumours. She told me she wasn't satisfied with the condition of affairs at Hurst Park. I probably told her to investigate or let me know as soon as she got hold of anything definite. I imagine I did say so. I think I would say so.

. . . . . .

"Lord Methuen : But she had got hold of something definite because she said she knew of these girls coming to London and going back late ?

"General Paine : That was after I left. . . . .

"Lord Farrer : Under the Service Regulations which govern this Force is it a duty to report rumours or not ?

"General Paine : No, I hope not, because we should never finish with the reports. I will tell you the only case I know if you like—the only case of immorality. It has not been referred to yet.

"Chairman [Lord Wrenbury] : We had better leave it."

I must again point out that as soon as I received Mrs. Kitto's definite complaint of serious irregularities and alleged immorality at Hurst Park I handed on her report immediately to my senior officer, General Brancker, for investigation. This was the first report I had received which justified me in taking this step.

It will be remembered that at the time of Colonel Powell's arrival I had arranged for a conference and short course of lectures for senior officers at Avery Hill, as now that I had been able to post out officers to take charge of the hostels, I was anxious to make some further appointments of experienced officers to Area Inspectorships. I had particularly arranged for this conference in order that the officers who had previously transferred from the Q.M.A.A.C. and the W.R.N.S. when the Air Ministry was set up, might meet

me and other officers unknown to them, and have the opportunity of discussing difficulties and of exchanging ideas. Unfortunately, owing to great pressure of work at the time of Colonel Bersey's supersession, I was unable to attend the conferences, though I gave the opening lecture and welcomed the officers on their arrival. I heard later that it was common talk among some of those who had transferred from the other corps that the Commandant, W.R.A.F., was shortly going to be got rid of, as the W.R.A.F. was to be handed back to the W.R.N.S. and the Q.M.A.A.C.

The senior officer in charge of the training centre came to report progress, and when discussing the conference, she told me that Mrs. Kitto, the Hostel Administrator at Hurst Park had admitted that she was greatly worried concerning certain irregularities which she (Mrs. Kitto) alleged existed at that camp.

I have already described (*see* page 143) the visit which Colonel Powell and I paid to Hurst Park, immediately after he succeeded Colonel Bersey, in order that he might get some idea at once of the position of the camp and hostels, and of the difficulties of maintaining discipline in such a large and scattered area.

Colonel Powell soon realised that Mrs. Kitto was confronted with a difficult task in her attempt to exercise control over the 500 motor transport drivers, who were quartered in isolated villas round the race-course and in some cases in the town. Others were accommodated at Hampton Court Barracks, which were situated at a considerable distance from the hostels. Mrs. Kitto herself had her orderly room and quarters in a large hostel which was some way from the other hostels and the barracks.

Colonel Powell told me afterwards that he reported our visit to General Brancker, and told him in view of the friction and gossip which undoubtedly existed and the rumours which were current, I had decided to move the two W.R.A.F. technical officers to other posts, so that I might judge of their qualifications in fresh surroundings.

During the Inquiry, the Chairman (Lord Wrenbury) showed plainly that he suspected that I had been unwilling for some reason or other that Colonel Powell should meet Mrs. Kitto when we visited Hurst Park. On the contrary, I was most anxious for him to do so, but as I have already explained, Mrs. Kitto was away at a "course," and was, therefore, unavailable for a few days.

"Lord Wrenbury: You went down to Hurst Park because she [Miss Douglas-Pennant] had told you something or other things were not going well. . . . . Did she say things were not going well, or something like that?

"Colonel Powell: Yes, she was not satisfied with Hurst Park I do not remember the exact words, but that evidently was in her mind.

.....

"Lord Wrenbury: Did she ask you to see the hostel administrator at all?

"Colonel Powell: I do not think so. We saw one or two officers, but I rather think the hostel administrator was not there, but I am not sure. Certainly it was not Mrs. Middleton Kitto. I did not see her there.

"Lord Wrenbury: What I meant was, Miss Douglas-Pennant was not anxious that you should see the hostel administrator?

"Colonel Powell: No, my Lord.

"Lord Wrenbury: And hear what account she gave?

"Colonel Powell: No, my Lord."

Colonel Powell's replies to Lord Wrenbury's questions are misleading. He cannot have grasped the Chairman's meaning as I am confident that he did not intend to give the impression that I had tried to prevent his meeting Mrs. Kitto.

I am still quite in the dark as to what possible reason I could have had for wishing to prevent a meeting between Colonel Powell and Mrs. Kitto, and I may be permitted to point out that shortly afterwards, in his evidence, Colonel Powell corroborated my statement that I had asked him to come to hear a very serious report which Mrs. Kitto made when she came to see me on her return from the Officers' Course. Her report on Hurst Park was so grave that I asked Colonel Powell to come to

hear what she had to say, and notes were taken down in shorthand by my secretary at the time.

Mrs. Kitto alleged that certain motor transport drivers who should have been living under her supervision in the hostels, were given permission by the O.C. and the two Technical Junior W.R.A.F. officers, without her knowledge or consent, to live in lodgings and come and go as they pleased; that the O.C. engaged girls in an irregular manner; that some of them were women of bad character, and that in certain cases women were allowed to remain on at the Depot beyond the time specified for the training; that girls were constantly given week-end leave and late night passes with Air Force officers; that a very bad tone prevailed; that certain of the W.R.A.F. rank and file were allowed to dine at mess when no other women were invited; that on guest nights scenes of the gravest disorder prevailed, which were bringing the Air Force Depot and W.R.A.F. into disrepute. Mrs. Kitto further alleged that the O.C. had allowed the two Technical Officers to have a private mess of their own in an isolated villa across the Park, a considerable distance from the central mess. Mrs. Kitto remonstrated on the ground that it was against the interests of discipline for these young W.R.A.F. officers to entertain guests late at night in this hostel, and to sleep in a tent which the O.C. had given them permission to use. With regard to their mess, Colonel Janson informed Mrs. Kitto, and I saw his statement in writing, that this arrangement had been made in compliance with instructions received from me. As a matter of fact I had personally organised the messing arrangements for the W.R.A.F. so as to ensure due comfort for the five hundred women and instructresses. I had given orders that the two officers in question were to mess at the W.R.A.F. officers' central mess.

Mrs. Kitto also mentioned a concrete case which indicated a grave state of affairs. I asked her why she had not informed me sooner of these urgent matters. She assured me that she had written five times to report to me, but had been so disheartened at receiving no reply, and at my apparent neglect, that she gave the

matter up as hopeless until encouraged by the officers who knew me at the Training Centre to ask my advice and to treat me with confidence.

With regard to the five reports which Mrs. Kitto alleges that she forwarded to me in the usual manner through the O.C., I can only say that I never received them.

After Mrs. Kitto had left my room, Colonel Powell and I discussed the situation at Hurst Park. Colonel Powell agreed with me that Mrs. Kitto's report was so serious that, without question, we must at once hand it on to General Brancker for investigation. Colonel Powell again repeated that he had already told General Brancker about our visit to the Depot, that things were not going well, and that Colonel Janson had made serious complaints against Mrs. Kitto, and had given us to understand that the two W.R.A.F. technical officers were most efficient, and that Mrs. Kitto, and Mrs. Kitto alone, was responsible for the lack of co-operation and discipline.

Colonel Powell and I had an interview with General Brancker the next day (August 29th, 1918). I handed him the typed report transcribed from the shorthand notes of Mrs. Kitto's verbal statement. It was my duty to do so, regardless of any consequences to myself, and I should do the same again in similar circumstances. There, so far as my responsibility was concerned, the matter ended, as General Brancker had dismissed me from the Force on August 28th.

I had no idea until General Brancker in our interview alluded to Colonel Janson, as an old friend, that the Motor Transport Training Centre, at Hurst Park, was under the control of the Equipment Department, from which General Brancker had just transferred, and that General Brancker had himself appointed Colonel Janson, and held him in high esteem.

General Brancker in his evidence stated that he caused full investigations to be made into Mrs. Kitto's allegations; that he lent his own special Provost-Marshal to assist in the matter, and that he was satisfied, to

quote General Brancker's words, that at Hurst Park "*everything was perfectly right and beautifully run, and that there was not a breath of criticism anywhere.*"

In reply to my Counsel's questions General Brancker made the following statement :—

"Mr. Hawke : Until the 28th you pledge your oath that you had never heard of any doubt as to the way things were going on at Hurst Park with regard to conduct.

"General Brancker : I heard there were things going wrong everywhere, but so far as Hurst Park went—No—I mean it was just the same as all the rest. There was absolutely nothing definite told to me about Hurst Park before the 29th.

"Mr. Hawke : You never heard any specific mention of Hurst Park as a place affected by the sort of thing you had heard of going on generally ?

"General Brancker : No.

.....

"Chairman [Lord Wrenbury] : I understand you to say that so far as you know these rumours of immorality were founded in fiction ?

"General Brancker : Yes."

In his evidence before the House of Lords Inquiry Colonel Powell, in answer to Lord Wrenbury, corroborated the fact that Mrs. Kitto had made serious allegations in her report, and had complained of the immorality which was permitted there.

"The Chairman [Lord Wrenbury] : Where did you see her [Mrs. Kitto] ?

"Colonel Powell : In Miss Douglas-Pennant's room, with Miss Douglas-Pennant. She was evidently much distressed and worried.

"The Chairman : Mrs. Kitto was ?

"Colonel Powell : Yes, and very anxious about the state of things down there. . . . . Towards the end she made a statement, as far as I can remember the words—that the women were practically the mistresses of the men or something like that. There was no definite statement against anybody, but she said generally that there was immorality there.

.....

"Mr. Hawke : Did she [Miss Douglas-Pennant] say that she would get hold of her and ask you when she had got hold of her if you would meet her ?

"Colonel Powell: I am afraid I cannot remember that. The fact is that Mrs. Middleton Kitto did come up. Miss Douglas-Pennant asked me to come and see her with her, and I did at once.

"Mr. Hawke: When Mrs. Middleton Kitto came she was quite definite as to what was going on, was she not?

"Colonel Powell: Do you mean definite on the fact that there was immorality?

"Mr. Hawke: Yes.

"Colonel Powell: Well, the words used to the best of my recollection were that the women were practically the mistresses of the men, and I think as far as that goes—that there was immorality, she was definite.

.....

"Mr. Hawke: You may be able to help me in another way. When Miss Douglas-Pennant asked you to meet Mrs. Middleton Kitto and you did and had this statement made, was it a surprise to you; was it something you had never heard of before?

"Colonel Powell: I do not think I had ever heard of it before, but I must say that I was not exactly surprised, generally speaking.

"Mr. Hawke: I am suggesting to you that Miss Douglas-Pennant had previously led you to believe that it was the sort of thing, although not in detail, that you would be told. Did you communicate at some time at all to General Brancker that the way to deal with it was the removal of an officer or officers—to transfer an officer or officers?

"Colonel Powell: That was afterwards. I said that should be done afterwards when it was enquired into by the South Eastern Area. . . . . ."

Major-General Sir Godfrey Paine, in reply to my Counsel, also confirmed the statement that there had been grave scandals at Hurst Park.

"Mr. Stuart Bevan: Did you yourself at a later date, when you became Inspector-General, have occasion to make enquiries as to conditions at Hurst Park?

"General Paine: No, I was inspecting Hurst Park some time after the Armistice. I cannot give you the date, and **the Commanding Officer told me that there had been grave scandals at Hurst Park,** and that it would be a good thing to get rid of the women there, as there was very little work for them to do, and so on, and I reported that to the Air Ministry, and Hurst Park was closed down very shortly after that."

CHAPTER XXXI.

Why Mrs. Kitto was not called.

Those who followed the case carefully must have felt after hearing the evidence of Colonel Powell and General Paine regarding Hurst Park, that as soon as Mrs. Kitto was heard, the whole matter would be cleared up. Mrs. Kitto, however, was not called on my behalf. In view of this it cannot be wondered at that a storm of indignation and criticism was aroused at what was regarded as my contemptible and cowardly attitude. I have been severely censured by the Committee in its Report, and held up to execration by Lord Curzon in the House of Lords on December 15th, 1919, as one who had—

> " 'Scattered wholesale general charges of immorality at Hurst Park' which have 'turned out to be grossly defamatory and untrue,' and to be **'a proof of the length to which in this case recklessness and malice were allowed to go.'**"

In view of the position in which I have been placed, and which reflects so seriously on my veracity, I may perhaps be forgiven for entering into this matter in detail so that the public may at length know the true facts of my otherwise incomprehensible attitude which has caused so much comment.

As, in the opinion of their Lordships, my word is unreliable, I may perhaps be permitted to point out that my statements can be corroborated by a large number of persons who assisted me throughout, and who feel as deeply as I do the unjust stigma which has been cast on my integrity and honour.

The explanation of the mystery is as follows :—

At the time that I was urging for the Inquiry I wrote to ask Mrs. Kitto to come to see me regarding her report on Hurst Park. She appeared to be pleased to do so, but she was away at the time as she had been demobilized, and had taken the post of Sub-Warden at Studley Agricultural College.

An appointment was arranged later which I was about to keep when Mrs. Kitto telegraphed to tell me that she was prevented from meeting me, and shortly afterwards she wrote to tell me that she had been advised by her solicitor, "who is also a Crown Solicitor," that it would be better for us not to meet.

A friend of mine went to see Mrs. Kitto, who gave her very serious accounts of the state of affairs at Hurst Park during the time she was Senior W.R.A.F. Officer there. I have the notes of this conversation, from which it is plain that Mrs. Kitto appears to have been most definite in her statements and convinced that her allegations were amply justified. Mrs. Kitto told my friend that she did not wish to be brought into my case as she was anxious to forget the miserable time she had spent at Hurst Park Depot. My friend suggested that it would hardly be fair and honourable conduct if Mrs. Kitto having made such serious allegations in her report, which I had been obliged to hand on to General Brancker, now refused to come forward to substantiate them. At the conclusion of the interview, Mrs. Kitto declared she would, if subpœnaed, substantiate every word of the report she had made to me as she had nothing to withdraw.

It seemed to me absolutely necessary that Mrs. Kitto should be called as one of my witnesses. I had several times referred to her during the course of my evidence. My solicitor, however, was unwilling to do so unless she allowed him to take down her statement.

In compliance with my request Mrs. Kitto had received from the Secretary of the Committee a letter dated 29th September 1918, requesting her attendance at the Inquiry. This, however, was not a subpœna, and in accordance with what I understand and believe was advised by her solicitor, she persisted in her determination not to attend unless forced to do so.

I heard soon afterwards that she had left Studley College, and was in London. Friends of mine in the W.R.A.F. and others did everything possible to get into touch with her, but failed to ascertain her address.

Just before the Inquiry opened, however, I received a message to say that she was leaving immediately for Canada, and was too busy to see anyone. With the greatest difficulty and trouble my friends traced her to Surrey.

In Surrey they were informed that she had returned to London—in London they were assured that she was back again in Surrey. I believe that these statements were misleading and that Mrs. Kitto was, under advice, purposely keeping out of the way. Again and again I made efforts to find her in order to persuade her to meet my solicitor to enable him to take her statement. A W.R.A.F. officer and another friend, having discovered Mrs. Kitto's address in Surrey, started from my house in London at 4 a.m. on November 1st, 1919. They were determined to have an interview with her before she could leave, as it was reported that she was in fact starting immediately for Canada to take up a Government post, and was keeping out of the way until a passage was available.

Mrs. Kitto was found by my friends, and eventually persuaded to see them. She again excused her unwillingness to appear in Court on the ground that she wished to forget the terrible time she had spent at Hurst Park. As, however, she had just read the report in the press of the evidence regarding Hurst Park she felt so indignant at the untrue statements made that she declared she was willing to come to the Court on November 3rd, and substantiate her Report and give what she alleged was the true version of the scandalous state of affairs. Mrs. Kitto kept her promise and attended the Court on November 3rd, but she was not called.

I had unceasingly urged my solicitor to call Mrs. Kitto to corroborate her report, and I saw my Counsel several times on this point. I put it to them that I felt strongly that whatever their legal and technical reasons might be they would not be understood by the plain man and woman in the street who quite justly would assume that I had invented the whole matter, and was afraid to risk exposure by calling Mrs. Kitto. I pointed out that surely it

would be a great mistake to allow such a bad impression to be created. I was reminded, however, that Lord Wrenbury, an eminent Judge, was trying the case, and that the opinion of the general public would not affect his verdict, and that it was the duty of the Court itself to call Mrs. Kitto under the terms of reference which had appointed it "to examine the circumstances connected with the dismissal of Miss Douglas-Pennant from the Women's Royal Air Force."

I am most anxious that my ignorance of legal matters should not lead me inadvertently to misquote my legal advisers in any way. I feel confident that they took what they believed to be the right and proper course, and I cannot speak with sufficient gratitude of those who did their utmost for me in this difficult case, or of their unfailing kindness and consideration. I gathered that in their opinion it was not their duty to call Mrs. Kitto, as I had merely handed on her report to General Brancker for investigation, and had made clear at the time that I had no means of verifying her allegations. It was, therefore, no part of my case to prove any of the statements made by Mrs. Kitto. On the contrary, in their opinion, it was for the Court of Inquiry to sift and probe the matter, and to call witnesses who like Mrs. Kitto must substantiate the statements they had made. I was still unconvinced, but when it was put to me that my Counsel had undertaken the case on my behalf, and were satisfied as to the wisdom of their course, I felt that whatever my own views were they must give way to the experience of my legal advisers, particularly as they did not share my fears as to false impressions and the grave reflections which would probably be cast, and have in fact been cast on my reliability and honour.

When my friends at last succeeded in tracing Mrs. Kitto, and in persuading her to attend the Court, I made fresh efforts to induce my solicitor to call her. He, however, assured me that it would be unwise to do so as he was "*convinced it would only irritate the Chairman, Lord Wrenbury.*" I could not account for my solicitor's fears. It seemed impossible to believe or even to suggest

that a Judge of Lord Wrenbury's standing and reputation would allow himself when trying a case to be irritated if a witness were called on behalf of one of the parties. I reminded my solicitor that Lord Wrenbury had himself asked in Court whether it was not our intention to call Mrs. Kitto. My solicitor repeated his firm conviction that Lord Wrenbury would refuse to allow us to call her, and that it would be unwise to run the risk of annoying him.

The following letter was obviously, I think, not written for publication, but, nevertheless, to make my position clear I feel bound to include it :—

"Coward & Hawksley, Sons & Chance.

"30, Mincing Lane, E.C. 3

"Cecil A. Howard.
"F. H. Chance.
"Robert Coward.
"Ernest B. Hawksley.

"London, 31st October, 1920.

"Dear Miss Douglas-Pennant,

"I received your message about Mrs. Middleton Kitto, and will mention the matter to Mr. Stuart Bevan, who I am seeing in another case early to-morrow. My own feeling is however that an application to call her as a witness if made now, would be refused, and that we should only irritate the Chairman by making it.

"Yours truly,

"(*Sgd.*) F. H. CHANCE.

"The Hon. Violet Douglas-Pennant,
"The Old House,
"Holland Street, W.8."

It was difficult for me to appreciate the legal point of view, or why my whole credit and future were to be sacrificed to save the Judge from a passing fit of irritation, and in view of the blame that has been cast on me, I can only point out that the fact that Mrs. Kitto was not called in no way reflects upon me, as I did everything in my power in the matter.

On the 3rd November, Lord Wrenbury suddenly called upon Lord Stanhope, who was in Court, to go into the witness-box.

In the course of his speech on July 30th, 1919, Lord Stanhope, when urging for an Inquiry, gave the House of Lords certain painful details supplied to him by Colonel Defries, who stated that they were corroborated by Colonel Janson's second-in-command. *I heard them for the first time during Lord Stanhope's speech, as the incidents referred to took place some months after my dismissal.*

Later on, my solicitor took steps to verify the statement made to Lord Stanhope by Colonel Defries, and repeated by him in the House of Lords. Having obtained the necessary verification, it was decided to refer to the incident mentioned by Lord Stanhope, as it indicated that no sufficient steps were taken after my dismissal to prevent the irregularities continuing, which were mentioned in Mrs. Kitto's report which I, in the course of my duty, had handed on to General Brancker without comment for investigation.

When Lord Stanhope was called to give evidence, Lord Wrenbury asked him who had told him the incident he (Lord Stanhope) had related in the House of Lords. Lord Stanhope appeared to be in doubt. He hesitated—said he could not remember—that it was either Miss Douglas-Pennant or Colonel Defries.

Later on, however, when questioned by my Counsel (Mr. Hawke), Lord Stanhope remembered the true facts, and said that to the best of his recollection Colonel Defries had told him.

"Lord Wrenbury: **From whom did you get the substance of . . . . . [certain] evidence?**

"Lord Stanhope: **I do not remember. I think probably from Miss Douglas-Pennant, but I am not quite sure.**

. . . . . .

"Lord Wrenbury: **Had you any other source from which to state your view as to what took place at . . . .?**

"Lord Stanhope: **My source of information I think was almost entirely Colonel Defries as far as I remember.**

. . . . . .

"Lord Wrenbury: **Now I want to direct your particular attention to this. Because it is in the minds of the Committee a most serious matter in this case. . . . . .**

"Lord Wrenbury: The evidence which we have had is this upon this subject . . . . . Now who told you that?

"Lord Stanhope: I think Miss Douglas-Pennant, **but I am not sure.**

. . . . . .

"Mr. Hawke: Your recollection may be vague, but is it not the fact that the information . . . .—try to think—that you had got it from somebody else, and you told Miss Douglas-Pennant?

"Lord Stanhope: It may be so, I am not sure.

"Chairman [Lord Wrenbury]: But we must have your recollection, please?

. . . . . .

"Lord Stanhope: I have no recollection of it.

"Lord Wrenbury: No recollection of what?

"Lord Stanhope: That I told Miss Douglas-Pennant first. I may have done so, but I have no recollection of doing so.

"Lord Wrenbury: . . . . . **Where did you get it?**

"Lord Stanhope: **I think I got it from Colonel Defries, but I am not prepared to swear.**

. . . . . .

"Mr. Hawke [to Lord Stanhope]: **You have mentioned Colonel Defries. Did he give you the information?**

"Lord Stanhope: **Yes, to the best of my recollection.**

I did not know Colonel Defries when he wrote to Lord Stanhope at the time that the latter was urging for the Inquiry. I was introduced to him later on by Lord Stanhope. I can only again repeat that I had never heard of the incident until Lord Stanhope mentioned it in the debate in the House of Lords. Shortly before that debate took place I was asked to put down details of concrete cases of irregularities for the information of those who were urging for the Inquiry. The fact that the unsavoury episode in question does not appear in this statement indicates that I had no knowledge of it at that time.

In spite of the fact that Lord Stanhope on recollection stated clearly that he believed that Colonel Defries had given him the information in question, their Lordships censure me severely for having, as they assert, made this statement to Lord Stanhope. To quote their words they

"attribute to these facts the greatest weight in measuring whether Miss Douglas-Pennant can be regarded as a person who shrinks from making even the gravest accusations against others without having any valid or reasonable grounds whatever for making them."*

If Mrs. Kitto and the other witnesses had been called, and their evidence heard, it is possible that the verdict of the Court might have been modified on this point.

On November 11th, Lord Wrenbury read the following letter in Court, from Lord Stanhope, which had been received by the Secretary of the Committee of Inquiry (Mr. Luard).

Copy. "29, Grosvenor Place, S.W. 1.

"November 10th, 1919.

"My dear Luard,

"I intend fully to withdraw and to apologise in the House for my statement in regard to Wormwood Scrubbs, but I shall be unable to withdraw my statements in regard to the condition of affairs at Hurst Park. Had the Committee seen fit itself to call Mrs. Kitto, she would have substantiated my statements. I have now seen Mrs. Kitto and also three other witnesses who were at Hurst Park, who corroborate and amplify Mrs. Kitto's evidence.

"I think the Committee should know this before they conclude their last public sitting in case they should wish to recall me.

"As you know, I gave an undertaking to the Committee to do nothing until its report had been made public. I understood this only to refer to my action in the House of Lords, and that it would not preclude me from sending a letter of apology, etc., to the solicitors representing Miss Glubb and Colonel Janson. But before doing so I should be glad to know that the Committee has no objection.

"Yours very truly,

"(*Signed*) STANHOPE."

Lord Wrenbury also read a letter from the ex-sergeant major at Hurst Park, who had been in charge of the equipment of the women's hostels at Hurst Park. I did not know the sergeant-major in question, though he had apparently seen me during some of my visits to that depot. It appears from the following letter that he had

* Lord Wrenbury did no give me any opportunity of clearing up this point.

noticed in the Press the reports of the misleading evidence regarding Hurst Park, and was convinced that it was his duty to make the true facts known :—

Copy.

" 52, Recreation Grove,
" Holbeck, Leeds
" (At present in London).
" 11th November, 1919.

" My Lords and Honourable Gentlemen,

" I wish to make known to you some circumstances connected with the case under investigation, which, after following the Press reports, I feel to be more important than any evidence already heard by you.

" My duties as Sergt.-Maj. in charge of the Equipping of Women's Hostels at Hurst Park, brought me vitally in touch with the difficulties of the W.R.A.F. locally. I had many unique opportunities of examining for my own information what I shall call the perpetuation of administrative irregularities, to the detriment of the good name of the Depot.

" I have never met the lady chiefly concerned in the case, but in order to assist in giving the Gentlemen of the Enquiry sound information to get at the Truth, I have offered myself as a matter of honour and duty to those who are at present unable to produce ample facts.

" I have carefully weighed the probable results of my action, but remain convinced of its necessity.

" I hold no personal animosity against my late Officer Commanding, and would say that I would as gladly meet his Counsel as that of the opposite side.

" Trusting some opportunity may be afforded me,

" I humbly remain, your Servant,

" (*Signed*) STANLEY FULLER.

" The Lords and Gentlemen,
" D.-P. Enquiry Com., London."

Lord Wrenbury asked whether either party wished to call this witness. The Air Ministry declined the offer. Lord Wrenbury then addressed my Counsel, Mr. Hawke.

" Lord Wrenbury : Your position is exactly this. You have been shown extreme indulgence up to the present as regards adding to the evidence. The Committee are desirous that you should have even more extreme indulgence. If you want to do anything more—you have to say so.

"Mr. Hawke: So far as I am concerned the only application I should make would be that the Committee should call him.

"Lord Wrenbury: I absolutely decline to call evidence as to a thing I have no knowledge of at all. The parties are all represented before us by Counsel. It is for Counsel to make up their minds whether they will call more evidence."

I was quite in the dark as to what Lord Wrenbury had in his mind when he stated that we had "been shown extreme indulgence up to the present as regards adding to the evidence." So far as I am aware, Mrs. Steel was the only witness who was called after my Counsel had presented my case. It will be remembered that Mrs. Steel, who was a total stranger to me, had telegraphed on her own initiative to the Chairman, expressing her willingness to attend before the Committee to refute certain statements made by Dame K. Furse (*see* page 346).

In my determination to bring out the truth, I made it plain to my solicitor that we must ask Lord Wrenbury's leave to call the sergeant-major, Mrs. Kitto, and the other witnesses from Hurst Park mentioned in Lord Stanhope's letter—all of whom were in Court at the time. My Counsel thereupon made the necessary application. Lord Wrenbury, however, refused to allow me to call these witnesses, unless I consented to the following terms:—

"Chairman: If you ask for that, we should not grant it, except upon the terms that Miss Douglas-Pennant should pay all the costs of this Inquiry from this moment, of all parties in the proceedings. Do you agree to that?"

I thus found myself confronted by this serious and totally unexpected difficulty. I was warned that owing to the large number of Counsel (12) including the Attorney-General (Sir Gordon Hewart), and Solicitors (9), in addition to my own legal advisers, it was probable that the fees for which I should be liable would amount "to anything, perhaps £3,000 to £4,000 per day," and that there was every prospect of the case being prolonged for some time if this fresh evidence were heard. I had no personal means, and none of my family or friends were available to consult with at the moment. The matter had to be decided instantly. It was, therefore, impossible to leave the

Court in order to seek advice. At the time it did not seem to be right to pledge myself to acquire liabilities which I was fully aware that there was no possibility of my being able to meet personally, and which I could not assume without consultation that others would be willing to advance. In view of this I felt obliged to declare that it was not in my power to call these witnesses on the terms laid down by the Court.

In spite of protests from the sergeant-major and another witness who demanded to be heard, Lord Wrenbury declared the Inquiry to be at an end.

Before closing the Court, however, the Chairman stated that the Committee had decided to announce before issuing their report that they found—

> "The accusation of general immorality at Hurst Park Camp to be entirely unsupported by any evidence."

Owing to the fact that Mrs. Kitto had not been called on my behalf, it can be well understood that their Lordships believed that I had brought forward false charges with regard to Hurst Park and had no witnesses to substantiate them. I did not realise that a Committee set up by the House of Lords to enquire and search out the truth would refuse, however, to hear witnesses who were actually in Court at the time, and who had come up on their own initiative in the interests of truth and justice after reading the reports of the false evidence, to assist their Lordships in probing the matter to the full.

It had been pointed out to the members of the Court in the letters from Lord Stanhope and the sergeant-major just read, that these witnesses believed that their evidence would corroborate and amplify my allegations as well as the statements made by Lord Stanhope in the House of Lords regarding the condition of affairs at Hurst Park, which he had declined to withdraw.

In spite of the fact that the evidence of these witnesses was not heard, their Lordships in their Report state—

> "In parting with the case the Committee have the satisfaction of feeling that it has had one good result. It has enabled them to say as they do say that the rumours of general immorality and

depravity at Hurst Park and at other W.R.A.F. Camps which have for months been hanging over the women who served at these Camps have not been supported before them by any evidence."

In view of their Lordships' verdict, I have been denounced as one whose evil disposition and wounded vanity led her deliberately to cast a slur on the good name of the W.R.A.F. in order to satisfy some vindictive feeling of revenge. On the contrary, I merely handed in Mrs. Kitto's Report to General Brancker for investigation, as I was bound to do in the ordinary course of my duty. It is difficult to see how I could have done otherwise, and it must not be forgotten that Colonel Powell in his evidence (*see* page 402) corroborated my statements regarding the contents of Mrs. Kitto's Report, and General Paine in his evidence, confirmed the allegation that serious scandals had existed at Hurst Park. Far from my wishing to cast reflections on the W.R.A.F., of whose splendid services I was so justly proud, it was my constant endeavour to defend them from the unjust rumours spread abroad to discredit the Corps. No one has suffered more than I have from the scandal-mongers who have not hesitated to attack even my personal character. From the Report it would appear to have been forgotten that during the Inquiry I endeavoured repeatedly to emphasise my appreciation of the W.R.A.F. and other Corps. To quote my words—

> " In some Camps I heard of irregularities. I heard of things which should not go on. In others I am thankful to say there was nothing of the sort. **The women were splendid,** and in the Camps where there was difficulty, or in the Camps where there might be difficulty through lack of discipline **my purpose was from the first and throughout to see that these Camps were properly officered so that the women should have the protection to which they were entitled."**

The following extracts from their Lordships' verdict show what a serious view they took of the fact that Mrs. Kitto was not called :—

> " Miss Douglas-Pennant in her evidence had repeatedly vouched Mrs. Kitto as the person from whom she knew things. The person who had made reports (unfortunately verbal and not in writing) and so on. . . . The Committee were naturally anxious

to hear what Mrs. Kitto had to say, but Miss Douglas-Pennant had not called her. Ultimately on October 29th, the Chairman pointedly called attention to the significant fact that Mrs. Kitto had not been called, and something was said upon it. . . . On the 3rd November, the Secretary informed the Committee before the commencement of the sitting that Mrs. Kitto was present in the Committee Room or in the corridor. She was there in fact. There is no dispute about it. The Chairman under these circumstances at the commencement of the sitting asked Mr. Hawke (Miss Douglas-Pennant's Counsel) whether he had any application to make inasmuch as the Committee had received an intimation that Mrs. Kitto was present. Mr. Hawke replied in the negative."

"And again the matter did not rest there. On the morning of the 11th November (after a week's adjournment to allow of Lady Rhondda giving evidence upon her return from America) the Committee sat specially to take her evidence. In all other respects the Inquiry was at an end. All the other evidence had been adduced and all the Counsel heard upon it. That morning (November 11th) two letters addressed to the Committee were laid before them by their Secretary—the one from Lord Stanhope and the other from one Stanley Fuller. . . . The Chairman read these letters to the parties pointing out that they suggested certain witnesses, including in particular Mrs. Kitto, who were alleged to be material witnesses in support of Miss Douglas-Pennant's case. The Committee offered her Counsel an opportunity even then, although the proceedings in fact were concluded to call the further evidence if they so desired, but inasmuch as Miss Douglas-Pennant had already put the parties accused to enormous expense against which the Committee had no power to indemnify them, they offered this extraordinary indulgence only if Miss Douglas-Pennant would undertake to pay the costs of all parties concerned in respect of this extension of the sittings. Miss Douglas-Pennant's Counsel elected not to call further evidence."

[NOTE.—**In view of Lord Wrenbury's stipulation, which debarred me from calling the witnesses, I must draw attention to the fact that it had been made clear during the course of the Inquiry (as the following extract from the evidence shows) that the Treasury had offered to represent all the officers concerned in the Inquiry, with the exception of myself. Colonel Bersey, however, preferred to be separately represented.—**

"Mr. Patrick Hastings: **I think in this case the Treasury very kindly suggested that you should be represented by them as the other officers were in this Inquiry?**

"Colonel Bersey: **They did, yes.**"]

"Mrs. Kitto was the very person who, as Hostel Administrator, owed the duty to know the facts as to immorality. It had been proved that the practice was to destroy night passes once a week or once a fortnight, and that the alleged night passes in question had been destroyed. Secondary evidence, therefore, was admissible to prove them. Mrs. Kitto was the person who could have given such evidence. Miss Douglas-Pennant could have called her, and did not call her. Notwithstanding she had originally on September 25th asked for her attendance, and notwithstanding that three times, viz., on October 30th, on November 3rd, and on November 11th, the Committee called her Counsel's attention to the matter, and gave them an opportunity to call her. Either Mrs. Kitto could not prove that immorality went on at Hurst Park, or Miss Douglas-Pennant having made this grave charge was deliberately abstaining from adducing evidence in support of it which was ready to her hand."

"The Committee did not call Mrs. Kitto themselves. Their reasons for taking that course are probably obvious, but it is desirable to state them. The Committee had before them the parties affirming and denying the issue of immorality. They were all represented by Counsel. Mrs. Kitto had been repeatedly vouched by Miss Douglas-Pennant as capable of giving evidence in support of her case that there was immorality. Mrs. Kitto's evidence was vital to support Miss Douglas-Pennant's allegations. Three times she had been invited to call her. She did not do so. If she was a truthful witness and would say what Miss Douglas-Pennant had said she would say it was incredible that Miss Douglas-Pennant would not call her. As regards the Committee calling her to give evidence the alternatives were two, either she would have testified that there was not general immorality, in which case the Committee did not want her for they had already arrived at the conclusion that upon the evidence as it stood immorality was not proved, or she would have testified that there was immorality, but Miss Douglas-Pennant's Counsel must have had reasons for thinking that she would not be believed for otherwise they would have called her. The Committee had no means of judging her credibility. They would have taken a false step if they had called a witness whose credibility—if she were going to depose that there was immorality—they had under the circumstances above stated reason to doubt.

"Miss Douglas-Pennant said repeatedly in evidence that in Colonel Bersey's time she was in possession of rumours only; that she could not act upon rumours only and so on, but the time came when Mrs. Middleton Kitto 'made quite a definite statement' to her. Miss Douglas-Pennant says so. The time came

when she was 'able to verify the facts.' She says so. This was when Colonel Bersey was relieved, and Colonel Powell took over, so before this Inquiry she had 'verified the facts.' She must have been in possession of the evidence to prove the facts. What are the facts she has verified? And where is the verification? The truth is that upon the evidence adduced before us she never had any facts. If we are to take it as we must that she has done her best to substantiate her allegations and that we are in possession of the best evidence she can give, we have great difficulty in believing that she thought she could substantiate these most grave charges."

After the Inquiry was over, when reviewing the position into which I had been forced, it was put to me that it would have been wiser in the public interest to have accepted Lord Wrenbury's terms and become bankrupt in order to bring out the truth and prevent the triumph of perjury and misrepresentation. Rightly or wrongly, I did not feel that I ought to give a promise which I knew I could not carry out, especially as my failure to do so would entail financial loss on others. I can only say that in refusing Lord Wrenbury's terms, I took what I believed to be the obviously honourable course.

That this decision of mine has had the unfortunate result of placing my friends and supporters in the light of misguided people who have taken up what appears from the verdict of the Court to be an unworthy cause is, perhaps, the most unendurable of the burdens which I have been called upon to bear. I was willing to sacrifice everything in the interests of truth and justice. I had done so up to the limit of my powers, and the fact that my personal means were exhausted and did not permit me to carry the matter through was no fault of mine. In spite of their Lordships' verdict, those who know the true facts assure me that their confidence is unshaken. I can only console myself with the thought, which, indeed, is a firm conviction, that the truth will come out in due course, and that those who supported me will be amply justified.

CHAPTER XXXII.

Unsolved Enigmas.

As to whether Mrs. Kitto should have been called by the Court or by my legal advisers, I am not competent to enter into. I can only make clear my personal action and attitude in the matter. I may, however, be permitted to express the regret which was felt and is still felt by all those who have clean administration in the Government Service at heart, that the Inquiry was confined to such narrow lines. Many questions of administration directly concerning the public welfare and materially affecting the public purse were passed over, while petty and trivial details were elaborated and magnified out of all proportion to their importance.

Their Lordships' attention had been focussed on the Air Ministry's strenuous efforts to prove that I was an irresponsible and inexperienced woman, who had no justification for alleging that irregularities had taken place, or that her work had been obstructed.

The impression was thus given that I had urged for an Inquiry and had wasted public time and money on utterly frivolous grounds to satisfy the venom and wounded vanity of an ill-balanced mind. Among the numerous points which it was hoped would have been thoroughly investigated are the following :—

1. Disorganisation.

The cause of the chaos and disorganisation which prevailed in the W.R.A.F. before I became Commandant, and which continued in the Department over which I had no jurisdiction but on which I was dependent for all supplies and information. This state of affairs is admitted in the Air Ministry's statement of case as : " necessarily existing in a new organisation " (*see* page 261).

Why, during the time I was Commandant I was unable to obtain, in spite of repeated requests, an accurate list of the Air Force Camps where the women were employed—of the Hostels where they were housed, or of the W.R.A.F. Officers ?

Why Lord Weir, in spite of the man-power shortage, retained the intermediary Department, M.3, which so seriously hampered

the progress of the W.R.A.F. and why he only consented to its abolition on the appointment of my successor, who was thus given a free hand and permitted to carry out the work unobstructed on the same footing as the Heads of the Q.M.A.A.C. and the W.R.N.S. (*see* pages 95, 135) ?

2. Accommodation and Equipment.

Why the Equipment Department failed to provide adequate accommodation for training the W.R.A.F. Officers and for housing the rank and file (*see* pages 95-101) ?

Why buildings, obviously unsuitable for their purpose, had, in certain instances, been erected or taken over on behalf of the Government, and large sums of public money thrown away in a hopeless attempt to render them suitable (*see* pages 14-18) ?

Why the Equipment Department, in spite of the necessity of quickly releasing men by women, held up during the ten weeks I was Commandant the Berridge House scheme for training relays of 1,200 W.R.A.F. every three weeks (*see* pages 263-278) ?

Why the Equipment Department told General Paine that this delay was due to the fact that **certain available houses suggested by me at Hampstead could not be utilised as they were unsuitable, full of dry rot, and in unhealthy surroundings, but that an alternative scheme would be submitted** (*see* page 278) ?

Why when the Equipment Department brought forward this alternative scheme the houses they recommended as highly suitable proved to be precisely the same houses, in precisely the same condition, as I had originally suggested weeks earlier (*see* pages 99, 278) ?

3. Uniforms.

Why there was such delay in providing uniforms so vitally necessary for the maintenance of discipline and for the fulfilment of the Air Ministry's pledges to the women on enrolment, and the consequent prevention of further strikes (*see* pages 11-13, 279) ?

Why I was blamed for this delay, though the Equipment Department was responsible for the provision of Uniforms ?

Why a large contract for the making up of the uniforms as well as for the supply of the material was given without any tenders being invited to a firm of macintosh makers, who had never made women's coats and skirts before (*see* pages 280-281) ?

Why I was assured that a particular material which seemed to me to be less suitable than others for the purpose, was alone available for the uniforms (*see* pages 12, 281) ?

Why, on the other hand, the Army Contracts Department was erroneously informed that we declined to accept any but this particular material for the W.R.A.F. uniforms. This stipulation necessitated the contract in question being placed with the firm

of macintosh makers who were the sole manufacturers of the material in question? (*See* evidence, page 96, Air Ministry Inquiry on W.R.A.F. Clothing).

Why the inspection of the W.R.A.F. Uniforms (previous to their issue), for which I was held responsible, was handed over to the Equipment Department without my knowledge or the consent of General Paine, and why, in spite of this, I was informed that no such change had been made (*see* pages 124-130, 283)?

Why, in view of the man-power shortage, the Equipment Department considered it advisable to employ 40 men from a Labour Battalion to do this work, which could have been undertaken by 12 women (*see* page 128)?

4. Regulations. Why the printing and issue of the revised version of the W.R.A.F. Regulations (F.S. Pub. 14) was not carried out during the time I was Commandant in spite of the fact that they had been passed by the Air Council and General Paine had given orders that they were to be printed forthwith (*see* pages 287-299)?

5. Irregularities. Why an unauthorised rank grade which did not exist under the Regulations was given to a W.R.A.F. Officer at Hurst Park, thus causing great friction and lack of discipline as she assumed authority to which she was not entitled; why this same Officer and another were allowed to draw irregular pay and allowances for which they were not eligible (*see* pages 392-393)?

Why it was denied during the Inquiry that five ladies had been promised senior posts before I became Commandant, when the correspondence published in a White Paper shows that not only had these promises been given, but that one of them, Miss Taylor, had received a letter authorising her appointment and pay (*see* pages 36-47)?

Why Lord Weir permitted Miss K. Andrew—a young Officer who had transferred from the Q.M.A.A.C. after a few months' service—to correspond with him direct, and to visit him behind my back in order to criticise my administration in contravention of the well-known rules of discipline (*see* pages 232, 246-248)?

What were the qualifications or experience of Miss K. Andrew which entitled her to advise in the matter of my dismissal, as admitted by the Air Ministry's statement of Case (*see* page 261)?

Why Miss K. Andrew, while she was still an Officer in the W.R.A.F., in defiance of the Regulations, invited certain Junior W.R.A.F. Officers to whom I had not felt it right to give high posts, to meet her to assist her in drawing up questions for Mr. Tyson Wilson, M.P., to ask in the House of Commons with a view to bringing about my dismissal on the ground that I was unpopular (*see* page 88)?

Why Lieut.-Colonel Williams, a temporary Officer in the Air Force, during the time he was acting Senior R.A.F. Staff-Officer, held, in defiance of the King's Regulations, a meeting of Air Force Officers in his room at Head Quarters to protest against General Paine's action in superseding Colonel Bersey and in appointing Colonel Powell to replace him (*see* pages 135-136) ?

6. Dame K. Furse.

Why Dame K. Furse informed Mrs. Steel (Flora Annie) that I was :—

> " unsuitable for the post and must leave " as " I was impossible and was ruining the W.R.A.F. and was so unpopular " ?

What opportunities Dame K. Furse had for forming this opinion and determining that I must leave, as I had only just accepted the post of Commandant and had not had any dealings with her at the time. Later on in her evidence Dame K. Furse admitted that she had arrived at this decision on information received from Mrs. Beatty and Miss Pratt.

Why Dame K. Furse offered appointments in the W.R.N.S. to Miss Pratt, Mrs. Beatty and Miss Andrew, all of whom had resigned from the W.R.A.F. without adequate reasons, and two of whom refused to remain at their posts until relieved, in defiance of General Paine's orders that they were to continue at work (*see* pages 57, 60) ?

Why Dame K. Furse, in spite of her promise to General Paine that she would take no such action, sent a telegram and instructions to the W.R.N.S. who had lately transferred to the W.R.A.F., informing them that she was in sole control, and that the women in the Air Stations were to remain under the W.R.N.S. ?

Why Dame K. Furse sent her deputy, Miss E. Crowdy, whom I did not know, to see General Brancker as soon as he succeeded General Paine ?

Why Miss Crowdy took this action instead of communicating with me or my deputy in the ordinary way, and why I was not permitted to know of this secret interview with my new senior officer ?

Why Miss Crowdy informed General Brancker that Dame K. Furse wished to communicate direct with him instead of with me, and obtained his consent to this (*see* page 147) ?

Why I was allowed to believe up to the moment of my dismissal that the only point at issue was the discussion between the Admiralty and the Air Ministry concerning the transfer of certain W.R.N.S. to W.R.A.F., which matter was being dealt with by General Paine and the Air Council in conjunction with the second Sea Lord ?

Why General Brancker in his draft official letter to me stated that he had satisfied himself that I could not be *persona grata* with Dame K. Furse and the Head of the Q.M.A.A.C. "under present conditions"?

Why no inquiry was made as to what these "conditions" were, and as to whether I was in any way responsible for them?

Why in the same letter and in his statement of case, General Brancker declared that he had been obliged to refer the matter to the Air Council for its decision, and that he was instructed by them to inform me that they had no further use for my services?

Why General Brancker made this statement in view of the fact that the Minutes of the Air Council show **that no meeting was held before my dismissal, and that the matter was only reported to the members three days after General Brancker had dismissed me?**

7. Lady Rhondda.

Why Lady Rhondda when writing a report on the women's Corps for the Minister of National Service obtained her information from Dame K. Furse, Mrs. Beatty, and Miss K. Andrew, and relied on hearsay gathered from those outside the Department instead of communicating in the ordinary way with General Paine or myself who alone could have given her the true facts (*see* pages 364-366)?

Why, during the same time, Mrs. Beatty, who had lately rejoined the W.R.N.S., visited Mr. Tyson Wilson, M.P., as well as Miss Strachey and Lady Rhondda, and persuaded them to bring about my dismissal?

Why no enquiry was made regarding Miss Strachey's "serious statement," or any questions asked as to how Miss Strachey obtained her information regarding my Department, though I never had any dealings with her personally or officially, and she is quite unknown to me?

8. Lord Weir.

Why Lady Rhondda, whom I hardly knew, and Miss P. Strachey, of whom I had never heard, visited Lord Weir on August 26th, 1918. Why I was not permitted to be present at this interview, or to know that they had brought such serious allegations against me. Why I was not allowed to know the nature of the charges communicated by Sir Auckland Geddes to Lord Weir in his interview with Major Baird (Parliamentary Secretary, Air Ministry), and **in a confidential letter to Lord Weir, the original and copy of which Lord Wrenbury's Committee were informed have both been lost in the Air Ministry and Ministry of National Service** (*see* pages 369-370)?

Why Lady Rhondda went to see General Brancker the same day (August 26th, 1918). Why I was not allowed to know that this interview took place, or to hear her charges. Why I was

hurriedly hidden by General Brancker's orders in the back regions at the Air Ministry, to prevent my becoming aware of Lady Rhondda's visit (*see* page 147) ?

Why General Brancker, who had only just succeeded General Paine, did not consult him as to the justification for Lady Rhondda's allegations, or give me any opportunity of hearing or meeting them; but in defiance of the Regulations ordered me to leave instantly—"Now! At once! To-morrow morning!" ?

Why, in spite of this, Lady Rhondda informed me and others that she knew nothing whatever about my dismissal—had not even heard of it—and expressed her astonishment at the way I had been treated. Why Lady Rhondda allowed me and others to believe this for nearly a year after my dismissal, until the sudden publication in the White Paper of an extract from her secret statement presumably necessitated her writing to *The Times* accepting responsibility, and admitting that she had advised Sir Auckland Geddes in the matter ?

Why Lord Weir did not permit General Paine nor myself to know that serious reflections had been cast on our Department by Lady Rhondda ?

Why we were not given any opportunity of meeting these charges, and of proving, as we could have done, that they were not only misleading but untrue ?

Why Lord Weir, at the time that he was actually arranging with Sir Auckland Geddes for my dismissal, allowed me to be assured by General Paine on August 17th, 1918, that my work gave every satisfaction, and that I could not be permitted to resign as I wished to do as a protest against the conditions prevailing which the Air Ministry would not allow me to remedy ? *

Why Lord Weir told me, after my dismissal, that his sole reason was that he believed that I could not obtain the co-operation of certain women's organisations (*see* pages 156-157) ?

Why Lord Weir declined to tell me the name of any organisation which refused to co-operate ?

Why he, Lord Weir, dismissed me on this ground when, in his evidence, he admitted that the organisation in question was the W.R.N.S., but that, to quote his words—

> " The impression I got was not necessarily that Miss Douglas-Pennant was at fault in it. It might be the other organisations, or other women that were at fault " ?

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*General Paine was not succeeded as Master-General of Personnel by General Brancker until August 25th, 1918. Major Baird saw Sir Auckland Geddes on August 19th, 1918, when Lady Rhondda's secret statement was immediately communicated to Lord Weir (*see* page 370).

Why in spite of this Lord Weir decided at the instance of Sir A. Geddes, Lady Rhondda, Miss K. Andrew, and others to order my instant dismissal without any enquiry?

Why General Paine, though he was my senior officer and a member of the Air Council, was not informed by Lord Weir that it had been decided to dismiss me?

Why General Paine, who alone knew anything of my work, was not asked, in accordance with the Regulations, to write a Report on me or hold an inquiry into the secret allegations brought against me?

Why the representatives of the Air Ministry brought forward untrue and unfounded charges as justification for Lord Weir's action? 9. Misrepresentation.

Why after I was dismissed were 143 of the Probationary Officers refused posts by the Air Ministry on the completion of their training, though many of them had the highest qualifications? Why the public was allowed to believe that I was the cause of this grave injustice, which was quoted as justification for Mr. Tyson Wilson's demand for my removal from the post of Commandant, on the ground that I dismissed numerous suitable officers in wholesale and arbitrary fashion (*see* page 161)?

What grounds General Seely had for stating in a letter to the National Political League "that in the best interests of the W.R.A.F. it was necessary that Miss Douglas-Pennant's connection with that Force should cease" (*see* pages 189, 190)?

Why Mr. Winston Churchill declared in the House of Commons on March 13th, 1919, **that my removal was due to the friction he alleged existed with Sir Auckland Geddes' Department, though I never had any dealings with it whatever** (*see* page 209)?

Why Lord Peel declared on behalf of the Government that I had dismissed three W.R.A.F. Officers, and degraded five others from senior posts to lower ones, and had constantly complained to Lord Weir until he felt that he could no longer support me (*see* page 251)?

Why Lord Peel made this unfounded statement when the true facts are that **I never dismissed or degraded any Officers,** and only saw Lord Weir twice during the time I was Commandant, when he expressed his satisfaction with my work, and continued to do so until General Brancker succeeded General Paine?

Why Lord Londonderry made the unfounded statement in the House of Lords (February 27th, 1919) that I had only been

superseded, and that Lord Weir had written to express dissatisfaction with my work, and informed me of his intention to supersede me?

Why Lord Peel, Lord Londonderry, and Mr. Winston Churchill, on behalf of the Government, stated that Lord Weir made the fullest inquiries before my dismissal, when, on the other hand, Lord Weir himself admitted in his evidence that he "made no enquiries and consulted no one"?

10. Mr. Cecil Harmsworth's Report.

Why the public have not been permitted to see Mr. Cecil Harmsworth's Report, though its publication was promised at the time that his Inquiry was instituted, and it is well known that it clears me from all blame?

Why no inquiry was made as to whether certain persons who brought about my dismissal are justified in objecting to its publication (*see* pages 222, 228)?

What was the secret and serious information about me which caused Sir Auckland Geddes and Lady Rhondda to believe that I ought to be dismissed immediately?

Why was I dismissed?

During the eighteen sittings of the Committee no Inquiry was made regarding these points so material to my case and to the elucidation of the truth.

When Lord Wrenbury's Report was issued it was clear that their Lordships had accepted the Air Ministry's statements and the evidence of the small group of people who resented my refusal to give high appointments to their unsuitable friends, and my determination to uphold the ordinarily accepted standards of efficiency and discipline.

The verdict of the Court was adverse to me throughout, with the exception of two points—Their Lordships do not find any fault with my work or efficiency, and they state that there is no imputation whatever upon my moral character. Personally I regret that this latter point was not touched upon during the Inquiry, and that my slanderers did not have the courage to come forward and say openly to my face what they have not hesitated to say behind my back or under the cover of privilege. I was thus unable to challenge Major E. H.

Cockburn (Temporary Officer, Equipment Department) to substantiate his statement (*see* page 224)

> **"That Miss Douglas-Pennant is a dishonourable woman, and we are prepared to bring forward witnesses to prove it."**

In the Report I am depicted as a woman of thoroughly bad and unworthy disposition, actuated by the meanest and lowest of motives, and apparently willing to perjure herself during five days in the witness box in order to satisfy the cravings of her wounded vanity for notoriety and revenge.

Their Lordships decided that my suggestion of intrigue was due to my "distortion of events and incapacity to see things in their true perspective."

> "In forming an opinion upon the probability or improbability of truth in Miss Douglas-Pennant's suggestion of intrigue, we have found it necessary to consider and estimate Miss Douglas-Pennant's character as evidenced by her demeanour before us, and by her evidence as she gave it . . . whether, for instance, she has shown herself to be chivalrous, courteous, and considerate, to be one who would rather attribute a good motive than a bad one, to be one who would probably work harmoniously with others.
>
> "Several witnesses have given evidence that she was never rude to them and so on. This we do not at all forget. But it is negative evidence."

Their Lordships further adjudge me to be of a violent and unreliable temperament which renders me incapable of working with others, and which drove my unfortunate subordinates to throw up their posts rather than, to quote the words of the Report, "suffer the indignities" to which I subjected them (*see* page 334).

Their Lordships, however, do not specify the nature of these "indignities." I am fully conscious of having treated my staff with every consideration. During the Inquiry the three officers in question could only bring forward as grievances the charges that I had told them to consult me before signing letters on matters of policy; that I had given them instructions that we must not be influenced by outside pressure at the Selection Board; that I had not thought it advisable to allow highly inappropriate garments such as tea gowns to be worn

when on duty, and that I had refused posts to certain people I believed to be unsuitable.

It is difficult to imagine that their Lordships would have wished me to have acted otherwise. It cannot be assumed that they are of opinion that it would have been my duty to surrender to intimidation and consent to appoint the inexperienced or unsuitable women recommended by these officers. It remains, however, undisputed that I was dismissed not for any failure of efficiency or administration, but mainly because I had incurred the resentment for the above reasons of Mrs. Beatty, Miss K. Andrew, and their friends, who by underhand methods succeeded in gaining the support of Lady Rhondda, Dame K. Furse, and others, to influence Sir A. Geddes and Lord Weir in the matter.

Few people are aware of the almost incredible fact that without any enquiry I was dismissed from the W.R.A.F., and from the post of Commandant to meet the wishes of these insubordinate officers. The slightest investigation on the part of Lord Weir and Lady Rhondda would have shown that both Mrs. Beatty and Miss Andrew were unfit to advise in the matter (*see* pages 83, 308).

Their Lordships' verdict exonerates everyone but myself from all blame, with the following exceptions :— *They decide that though Miss Pratt, Mrs. Beatty, and Miss Taylor did not act "in concert with a view to compelling or inducing Miss Douglas-Pennant's removal or resignation upon improper grounds, we consider, however, that attention should be drawn to the manner in which these ladies refused to obey orders and carry on until relieved. In Sir Godfrey Paine's words this was 'Mutiny,' and he expressed his opinion with which we concur that their action in time of War deserved the strongest criticism, and increased the difficulties of Miss Douglas-Pennant."*

The powers that be, however, do not appear to have shared their Lordships' views on this point. Miss Pratt, Mrs. Beatty, and Miss K. Andrew had on leaving the W.R.A.F. been offered posts in the W.R.N.S. by Dame K.

Furse, which were accepted by Mrs. Beatty and Miss Andrew. Miss Pratt obtained a high post in the Civil Service. After the Inquiry, in spite of their Lordships' criticisms, Miss Pratt and Miss Andrew were further promoted to the high and very responsible posts which they at present hold under the Government.

Their Lordships commend the action of Dame K. Furse and the manner in which General Brancker dismissed me, but they note with regret that "the reasons assigned by him at the time (of my dismissal) and subsequently by Lord Weir are not always consistent with each other." Their Lordships also deprecate the fact that a reply given in the House of Commons on behalf of the Air Ministry which Lord Weir alleged was "not exactly a truthful answer" was excused by him on the ground that it was a "*Parliamentary answer.*" Lord Wrenbury's Committee adds "We sincerely trust that there will never come to be known something called a '*Parliamentary answer*' as distinguished from a true answer."

By this verdict of the House of Lords Committee, the action of Lord Weir and Lady Rhondda appears to be fully justified, as I am placed in the light of one who is incapable of forming a sound judgment, and who is totally unfit to hold any position of responsibility.

Like most other people I have always believed that it is unsportsmanlike to challenge the decision of the Umpire. I, therefore, carefully reviewed my actions during the ten weeks I was Commandant in the light of Lord Wrenbury's censure, but I failed to see, and I still fail to see, how anyone with any sense of public duty could have acted in any other way in view of the circumstances in which I was placed. Supported as I am by the confidence of all those who know, or who can discern the truth, and possessed of a perfectly clear conscience, the violence of the speeches of the opposing Counsel and the severity of the verdict have left me unmoved. As I listened to the Attorney-General and Mr. Rigby Swift on behalf of the Air Ministry, and to the other Counsel, I could only marvel that a woman to whom

they credited such an evil disposition and contemptible motives had been permitted to remain over sixteen years in public life without protest or previous eviction.

In urging for an Inquiry I counted the cost and the possible results of my action. I was warned at the time that every effort would be made, for reasons of political expediency to prevent my emerging successfully. I realised fully that many people would accept the view so widely spread that I was merely an incompetent and inexperienced war worker, who had succeeded in securing the post in order to gain notoriety, and whose demand for an Inquiry was instigated by wounded vanity and a desire to wreak vengeance on all those who had protested against what they alleged was an undesirable appointment.

I did not come forward to claim public sympathy for a personal grievance, or to salve the wounded pride ascribed to me. On the contrary, I cannot emphasise too repeatedly or too clearly that it was for the sake of the principle at stake, that I felt obliged to undertake this most unpleasant task. I claim that I have acted throughout on constitutional lines, and with every regard for official procedure. I have never wavered from this policy in spite of many inducements and requests. It would have been easier for me to have raised a storm of indignation by allowing the large number of W.R.A.F. Officers, who wished to do so, to resign as a protest against the unfounded allegations that my dismissal was necessitated by gross unpopularity (*see* page 150). I preferred to take what appeared to me to be the right and proper course. As I felt that my duty was a public one I was willing to face all the mud which I realised would be thrown at me and with which I have indeed been pelted. I did not imagine at the time that these accusations would be carried to the point of seriously alleging that I was a person of well-known disreputable character, a traitor to my country, and that the Air Ministry would go the length of alleging that I was suffering from "hallucinations run mad" which necessitated my instant removal from the Force.

That a public servant should be refused permission to resign, and then summarily dismissed a few days later without any explanation except alleged gross unpopularity, without any Inquiry, has created a precedent in the Government Service too dangerous for it to be allowed to pass unchallenged. Doubtless I was "grossly unpopular" with those who resented the fact that I did not feel able, in the interests of the W.R.A.F., to give responsible posts to unsuitable people. Surely to dismiss an official on the sole grounds of unpopularity, when not one single reasonable instance could be substantiated, is contrary not only to the best interests of the Service but to the most elementary principles of justice. For this reason my case is regarded as a "Test Case" by those who are determined that at any cost a clean public service and a proper standard of efficiency shall be maintained. My friends and I are fighting for a matter of principle which vitally affects the status of all persons in the employment of the Government, and the importance of which cannot be disregarded, *i.e.*, the right of an accused person to know before dismissal what charges are brought against him, and to be given a fair opportunity of defending himself before being condemned.

It has been laid down in the past that a Secretary of State must have unfettered discretion in any decision he arrives at regarding his subordinates. All reasonable people desirous of maintaining discipline in the public service will agree that this stipulation is a wise one. Obviously, however, it is assumed that the Secretary of State, who presumably is a man of wide experience and sound judgment, would not allow himself to form an opinion on any matter of importance unless he had made searching enquiry into the true facts of the case. When his decision is arrived at and acted upon, it is taken for granted that the Secretary of State, to quote again Lord Londonderry's words (*see* page 377):

> **"has taken every possible advice upon the subject, and considered it with the most close personal contact he can possibly achieve."**

Surely on this understanding, and on this understanding alone, the Secretary of State would be fully entitled to

expect that his decision would be upheld at all costs. Under these circumstances he could rightly claim that it would be fatal in the interests of discipline if his judgment were tampered with or even questioned.

However, in spite of Lord Londonderry's assurances, in spite of Mr. Winston Churchill's emphatic declaration in the House of Commons (13th March, 1919), that Lord Weir's decision was only arrived at "*after informing himself personally, as he was bound to do in an important matter like this, through every channel he could,*" Lord Weir on his own admission did not take any of these preliminary steps before ordering my dismissal, and made no enquiry whatever. To quote his words—

> **"I consulted no one . . . It may be alleged that I should have instituted some special inquiry before acting in that manner. I can only say that it is foreign to my own methods of working."**

It will thus be seen that Lord Weir had set aside the policy and procedure which up to the present had guided the decisions of Secretaries of State and Heads of Departments in these matters; though his colleagues in the Government, on the other hand, were assuring the public that he had made the fullest enquiries, and that there were no grounds whatever for the widespread belief that a serious miscarriage of justice had taken place.

Mr. Winston Churchill on 13th March, 1919, declared:—

> "Of course, if it is alleged that Lord Weir's decision was not an honest one, and that the exercise of his discretion was malicious or corrupt, or **if it is alleged that those persons whose duty it was to advise him on this matter, brought untruthful statements to his notice and misled him, and exercised undue influence on him, and perverted his judgment so that it was a corrupt and malicious judgment, that is an entirely different matter, and not, for one moment, would I obstruct or resist an inquiry into that,** and if the case is such as *prima facie* would commend itself to reasonable people, the Government will be delighted to facilitate the trying and testing of that matter to the full.
>
> "If a *prima facie* case of malice or corruption is deployed by responsible people against any person concerned in this matter, if a definite charge is made against a named person, we will have the matter thoroughly investigated and sifted."

In my evidence I made clear that I had no intention of suggesting that Lord Weir's action was due to "malicious or corrupt" motives on his part. I must again emphasise that point. On the other hand, however, I maintain and have proved that he was directly influenced by the untrue and misleading statements of those who advised him and Sir A. Geddes in this matter, and whose opinion he (Lord Weir) accepted on his own admission without any sort of investigation, and whose accusations I have never yet been allowed to know.

This case has shown how easy it is for a Secretary of State to be coerced and misled if he allows himself to rely on hearsay. The pressure that was brought to bear on Lord Weir, the influence of misleading reports, unfounded rumours, gossip, and backstair methods may again be used in similar circumstances to discredit an innocent person or to promote a political intrigue.

For the protection of the individual in similar circumstances, the Regulations lay down that summary dismissal cannot be inflicted without an Inquiry in the case of an official who, like myself, was debarred from the privilege of resigning without permission.

If dismissal from the Service is considered justified, it is reserved solely for cases of disgraceful conduct which merit this life-long stigma.

In the Civil Service, on the other hand, where every official is entitled to resign, it is possible, though rarely resorted to, to dismiss an official without a formal enquiry if the circumstances warrant such an extreme measure.

Unless the regulations are strictly adhered to there can be no safety in the Government Service, a feeling of unrest and mistrust will be stimulated and encouraged which will destroy all hope of efficient and conscientious work.

The Regulations were enforced with Lord Weir's concurrence to retain my services when I wished to resign, and set aside a few days later in order to dismiss me after Lady Rhondda's secret Statement had been communicated to him. That it should be in the power of one man acting under the influence of outside pressure

without any enquiry to penalise for life an individual of whom he has practically no personal knowledge, is surely contrary to the principles of elementary justice and the interests of the public service. Once such a precedent is established, a Secretary of State or Head of a Department is liable to become the tool of any political wirepuller or unscrupulous person who has an axe to grind or a vested interest to promote.

That Lord Weir allowed himself to be influenced by a subordinate officer, with only a few months' service; that he permitted her to correspond with him, and visit him behind the back of her Senior Officer in order to criticise and intrigue, seems incredible to those who are anxious that a standard of just and honourable dealing should be maintained in the Government Service.

Many of us have become familiar with the tactics employed by some at political elections. There appears to be no limit at those moments to the reckless slanders systematically spread to the detriment of one or other of the candidates. That these same methods have been introduced into certain Government Departments during the War is greatly to be deprecated.

My case is by no means singular. In the past, however, it has been usually the Junior Officials who have suffered. The Seniors have been less liable to attack, probably because they were better protected, and were surrounded by reliable colleagues.

That it was possible in my case to discredit successfully a Senior Official was due to the fact that at the outset until I had built up a reliable staff I was almost singlehanded against those who resented necessary reforms.

If it is impossible to find fault with the work, then secret personal attacks are made, to create an atmosphere of prejudice and distrust. There is little variety—discourtesy, unpopularity, immorality, treachery, delusions —the whole gamut of allegations is brought into play.

If such methods are to be countenanced and defended, and "Parliamentary" replies permitted to pass unchallenged, officials who wish to retain their posts will find

it necessary in the future, when accepting office, to ascertain what particular clique and policy is in the ascendancy in the Department. Like me they will have to take their choice when confronted with threats, and decide whether to act contrary to what they believe to be right in order to safeguard their position, or whether to stand firm and refuse to act in a manner which, rightly or wrongly, they believe to be against the public interest.

In my case I ignored the peremptory warning that my dismissal would be promptly brought about unless I consented to make certain unsuitable appointments, and to do as I was asked. I have suffered accordingly, but the thinking public will possibly realise that if this coercive policy, nearly akin to Bolshevism, is allowed to continue, the public service must inevitably also suffer, and the wastage, inefficiency, and reckless expenditure, of which we daily see examples, will continue unchecked.

I feel satisfied that I could not claim as I do claim the respect of any honest-minded man or woman if I had retained my post and earned a discreditable popularity at the price of consenting to make unsuitable appointments, and of accepting unsatisfactory and extravagant accommodation against what I knew to be the public interest. I feel convinced that every honourable man and woman, including the members of the Court, if confronted with the same difficulties would have felt obliged to act in precisely the same way. In spite of the bitter attacks which have been levelled at me; in spite of the recriminations and censure heaped upon me, I have no hesitation in saying that I should do exactly the same again under similar circumstances.

The policy of the Air Ministry to ignore irregularities was continued after my dismissal. Others in the W.R.A.F. who felt it to be their duty to report serious wrongdoing have been penalised in much the same manner as myself, though to a lesser extent.

The Clothing Controller, Miss E. O'Sullivan, is one of these. She was not only dismissed from her post, but the Air Ministry have refused to pay her legal

expenses, incurred in the Inquiry set up by that Ministry under pressure from the House of Commons, though the result of the investigation showed that irregularities had taken place for which Miss E. O'Sullivan was in no way to blame (*see* pages 282, 285).

Another senior W.R.A.F. Officer who felt obliged to report most serious delinquencies on the part of certain officers, was instantly ordered to resign. On her refusing to do so, she was at once demobilised, and the subordinate, of whose conduct she had complained, was promoted in her stead to the command of the W.R.A.F. in the same Camp where the irregularities in which this Officer was implicated, had occurred.

It would appear from the present policy in these matters that those who wish to retain their posts can only do so if they can bring themselves to shut their eyes and refrain from reporting irregularities in their departments, however detrimental this may be to the public service.

I wish to make perfectly clear I do not for one moment believe that Lady Rhondda had any intention of giving her personal support or the support of Women's National Service to irregularities. On the contrary, I am convinced that she merely fell a victim to her credulity and inexperience. It must not be forgotten that the post she held for a short time at Women's National Service was her first experience of official and public life. It is true that her father, Mr. D. A. Thomas (afterwards Lord Rhondda), when accepting office under Government and a Peerage, had made her Chairman of several of his companies. In that capacity, however, Lady Rhondda (then Lady Mackworth) was protected by the expert advice of her father's experienced managers and secretaries.

Possibly she did not realise that all senior officials in Government Departments have to guard themselves against the efforts which are frequently made by unscrupulous persons to gain their ear and warp their judgment. It is evident that Lady Rhondda had no idea of the intrigues and vested interests which dominated

the Air Ministry, and which gained for it the unenviable title of "Bolo House."

The case of Mr. Tyson Wilson, M.P., is very similar; like Lady Rhondda, he was persuaded by Mrs. Beatty and her friends to urge for my dismissal (*see* page 216). Many months later (1920), when the trial for fraud of the two impostors, Messrs. Hease and Fletcher, took place at the Old Bailey, it became public knowledge that Mr. Tyson Wilson, who had introduced them in all good faith to certain Heads of Government Departments, had been seriously misled and misinformed as to the character of the prisoners. The verdict which resulted in Messrs. Hease and Fletcher being sentenced to penal servitude with hard labour created a sensation. People who were aware of the active part Mr. Tyson Wilson had taken in bringing about my dismissal asked themselves whether it might not be the case that his judgment was also at fault when he demanded my dismissal on the grounds that he knew on reliable authority that I was not only a virago and a bully, but that my personal character would not bear investigation.

Long after the Inquiry was over, Miss Strachey was approached by certain representative women, and was requested to explain the grave statement which she and Lady Rhondda had made to Lord Weir. Miss Strachey then declared that her statement only referred to the serious conditions in the W.R.A.F. Camps.*

In view of this it is difficult to understand why the Attorney-General and the Counsel for the Air Ministry thought it necessary to represent me as a person suffering from "*hallucinations, hallucinations run mad,*" as one "*saturated with suspicion, who was totally unfit to be left in control of the Women's Royal Air Force,*" and who deserved the severest censure for making statements they alleged were untrue. If Miss Strachey's serious statement merely corroborated my allegation that grave irregularities existed in certain Air Force Camps, why

* Miss Strachey appears to be under a misapprehension as there were no W.R.A.F. Camps. Probably she was referring to the Air Force Camps where W.R.A.F. were employed.

did not Lady Rhondda and Miss Strachey come forward during the Inquiry to support me? It seems incredible that if the serious conditions in the Air Force Camps were in fact the only subject of Lady Rhondda's secret report, Sir Auckland Geddes, Lord Weir, and Major Baird, who knew the true facts, should have allowed me to be so unjustly misrepresented and condemned by their Lordships in the eyes of the public as one who, to quote from their report, "was eager to find evil which did not exist."

If the instructions of the Attorney-General were such as to justify his allegation that I "was totally unfit to be left in control of the Women's Royal Air Force," he could hardly have been instructed at the same time as to the fact (which it now occurs to me to make public) that in the middle of October following my dismissal, I was approached by Major-General C. Cayley who came to me from the Air Ministry with a most pressing invitation to take command under him of the W.R.A.F. in Scotland.

Surely the Air Ministry cannot have it both ways. If I was such a woman as the Attorney-General on their instructions stated, it was extremely wrong of them to have recommended me in most flattering terms as the person best fitted to take charge of the W.R.A.F. in Scotland. The Air Ministry can choose which ground they would prefer to adopt—*i.e.*, either that I was unfit, or that they were unpatriotic in appointing an unfit person for such a responsible post in Scotland.

What I suspected at the time to be the truth (and I see no reason to change my opinion) was that the Air Ministry, in causing me to be offered this appointment at the moment when my friends were pressing for an Inquiry, desired to gag me and lend colour to the allegation that I had been superseded and not dismissed *brevi manu* as Lord Wrenbury so aptly described it. General Seely must have forgotten or cannot have been aware of this action on the part of the Air Ministry, when he wrote the official statement that Lord Weir and the Prime Minister had decided that "in the best

interests of the W.R.A.F. it was necessary that Miss Douglas-Pennant's connection with that Force should cease "* (*see* page 189).

Again, if I am possessed of this "hallucination run mad," it is possible that people who read this statement, may ask themselves whether the fact so plainly shown during the Inquiry that I refused to listen to idle and unsubstantiated rumours, and only felt justified in reporting one case to my senior officer, *i.e.*, the definite report of Mrs. Kitto, is not somewhat inconsistent with the picture drawn of me by the Counsel for the Air Ministry, by their Lordships' Report, and by Lord Curzon in the House of Lords.

To the lay mind, ignorant of legal etiquette, the attitude of the legal advisers of the Air Ministry, throughout this case, opens up a wide field for speculation.

When they endeavoured to cast the blame on me for the deficiencies in the Recruiting Department the papers in their hands at the time proved that I had nothing whatever to do with recruiting, and it will be remembered that Lord Weir himself disowned the Statement of Case drawn up by them (*see* page 380).

The question may well be asked how far it is incumbent on the legal advisers of the Ministry, when endeavouring in the course of their duty to shield a member of the Government, to bring at the same time charges against his opponent, which are obviously unfounded, but which cast on the latter the burden of disproving them and of dispelling the unfavourable atmosphere they create. The situation appears to be further complicated in my case by the fact that up to the moment of my dismissal we were all, from Lord Weir downwards, alike in one respect, that we were all servants of the public, and, therefore, it must be assumed, equally entitled to expect equal justice from the law officers of the Crown. In view of the precedent created, fair-minded people must decide how far they approve and endorse the line of action

* General Brancker must also have forgotten his letter in which he informed me that "the Air Council has no further use for your services."

followed in my case by the Air Ministry and certain Members of the Government.

Those who have read this statement and are aware of the extraordinary tangle of inconsistencies and chameleon-like changes in the conflicting charges brought against me, may possibly ask themselves whether there is not some explanation which the authorities found it difficult to express in public.

In view of their Lordships' verdict, it might well be assumed that the master-key to the whole mystery lay in the fact that I was a person of such unfortunate and cantankerous disposition, so ill-natured and ill-bred, so irresponsible and unreliable, that every effort had to be taken to get rid of me, while at the same time no definite allegations could be properly substantiated to justify summary dismissal should the awkward question be raised. If this were in fact the case, the Air Ministry and Ministry of National Service would deserve the fullest sympathy for the dilemma in which they were placed, and their laudable efforts to rid the Service of such a disturbing element would indeed be a matter for congratulation when successfully accomplished.

It would seem to be unfitting for me to enter into a discussion on this point for fear of appearing to be egotistical or a prejudiced party. I can, therefore, only refer those who are in doubt to my staff in the W.R.A.F., of whose confidence and sympathy I cannot speak too highly—to my colleagues of many years' standing, and offer to show if desired the hundreds of letters and numerous mementos I have received from fellow workers in many parts of the world indignantly protesting against what they unanimously describe as a preposterous accusation. They assure me that the verdict of the House of Lords which they know to be undeserved has not altered their opinion, and that their confidence is strengthened by their gratitude that I refused to be intimidated.

Nine years ago, at a time when women were first beginning to take their share of work on the same footing as men, I came into the Government Service after many

years voluntary work. I did not do so in order to obtain a position, but in a whole-hearted endeavour to assist in proving that a woman holding a high post with executive powers does not necessarily bring in her train friction, gossip, small-minded prejudice, and a lack of appreciation of justice and fair play.

For six-and-a-half years I held one of the most responsible posts a woman has held, and I submit that not one breath of what has been alleged against me by Lady Rhondda, Mrs. Beatty, Miss Andrew, Mr. Tyson Wilson, M.P., and other strangers was ever hinted at during that time or previously.

Part V.—Retrospection.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

Aftermath.

In spite of the fact that the verdict of the House of Lords Committee cast no reflections on either General Guy Livingston or Colonel Bersey (now Mr. Bersey), the day after the Inquiry concluded both caused Writs to be served on me alleging that I had libelled them in the private and confidential letter I had written to the Prime Minister immediately after my dismissal, and also in a statement which I had sent to Mr. Winston Churchill in response to his pledge to both Houses of Parliament that an Inquiry should be held if I could show a *prima facie* case (*see* pages 199, 432). These confidential papers were published by Mr. Winston Churchill's instructions without my consent being obtained, in a White Paper issued to both Houses of Parliament some months before the Inquiry. With regard to my letter to the Prime Minister, it will be remembered that I had felt obliged to explain to him, as he was the official chief of the Insurance Commissioners, why I could not return to my former post as a National Health Insurance Commissioner until an Inquiry had been held into the cause of my summary dismissal from the W.R.A.F. and into the reasons which had prevented me getting the conditions on to a more satisfactory footing during the short time I was Commandant. In the statement which I sent to Mr. Winston Churchill I gave instances of obstruction in support of my allegations.

Mr. Winston Churchill's action in publishing this correspondence, which I had written with a view to having the matter properly investigated and the truth of my allegations tested, has aroused grave apprehension and dissatisfaction among those inside and outside the public service who realise the dangers of the prevailing policy of "Hush" and who are determined that a clean and efficient administration shall be maintained at all costs.

That confidential reports published in a White Paper—a document which has always been regarded heretofore as privileged—should be made the occasion for libel actions appears to create a most undesirable precedent. So far it has been held to be the duty of a senior official to report irregularities in order that they may be investigated, and put a stop to if proved to exist. In laying me open to actions for libel Mr. Churchill has made it plain that any official in the future who feels it to be his duty to report irregularities will have to refrain from so doing and acquiesce in their continuance unless he can face the risks of being forced to pay heavy damages if he is unable to bring legal proof of what he honestly believes or may know to be a fact.

When the Report of the Inquiry was presented to the House of Lords on December 15th, 1919, Lord Curzon, on behalf of the Government, delivered a scathing attack upon me. He reproached me in the severest terms with having brought charges which, he alleged, were—

"grossly defamatory and untrue."

He declared that I had made these accusations "*under the shelter of privilege*" and described them "*as a proof of the length to which in this case recklessness and malice were allowed to go,*" and he assured the members of the House of Lords that "*rarely, if ever, has such an attack met with such complete refutation and exposure.*" As two actions against me for libel were *sub judice* at the time, and reports of this Debate were widely circulated in the press, many people were astonished that Lord Curzon should have felt justified even on a privileged occasion in pronouncing the opinion that I was actuated by malice. Lord Curzon made it plain that he believed me to be too cowardly to say in the open what he alleged I had not hesitated to say under the shelter of privilege. This serious aspersion is not only wholly undeserved, but absolutely untrue. Everything I said I believed to be true, and I had no intention of injuring or paining anybody excepting in so far as appeared to me to be necessary in the discharge of my duty. Nevertheless, I was held liable in damages for libels which I withdrew, and for which I apologised and paid.

As will be seen from the preface, this statement has been written at the request of certain lovers of justice, fair play, and clean administration, many of whom were previously unknown to me, but who, after careful inquiry, felt strongly that it was necessary that the public, whose servant I was, should, after the official conclusion of the War (Sept. 1st, 1921), at last know the true facts.

I am only one of many innocent persons who during the War were unjustly penalised and "broken," because in endeavouring honestly and straightforwardly to serve their country in a time of great peril, they came up against powerful interests that were purely personal and selfish. Of this I am fully aware, and I must emphasise the fact that one of the principal reasons for issuing this statement is the knowledge that these influences exist, and that there have been many other victims of the vicious system of slander, secrecy, and subterfuge, which was employed so successfully against me.

Many people are convinced that these evils will continue to increase to the detriment of the Government Service, and that political expediency will be permitted to override elementary justice unless the eyes of the public are opened to the grave dangers of this pernicious outcome of modern bureaucracy, controlled by political and financial interests.

Nearly two years have now passed since the Report of the Inquiry was published, yet the mystery still remains unsolved—*why I was dismissed from the Service summarily and with contumely.*

During the whole course of the House of Lords Inquiry it was plain that my accusers were continually forced to shift their ground, abandoning as untenable—first the charges that I was unpopular, guilty of ill-bred behaviour, inexperienced and incapable ; then, the amazing assertion by the Counsel for the Air Ministry that my allegations regarding intrigue and obstruction were "hallucination, hallucination run mad," and that Lord Weir had ordered my removal as I was obviously "unfit to be left in control of the W.R.A.F." Finally,

just as the Inquiry closed, I heard for the first time of Miss Strachey and the "serious statement."

It is difficult to understand how the Air Ministry could feel justified in bringing forward under the cover of privilege the highly damaging statement, *i.e.*, "hallucination" without a shadow of foundation to substantiate it, and without giving me an opportunity of refuting it.

The following extract from a letter of warning I received before my dismissal, from a General Officer unconnected with the Air Force, shows that I had good ground for my allegation that I was the victim of an intrigue :—

> **"It is perfectly horrid, but I have heard . . . . . that people about you at your present job are leaving no stone unturned to try to get you to resign because you are too absolutely fair and straight for them. . . . . I only hope you will go all the stronger and all the straighter, and defeat your disloyal entourage."**

An Officer attached to the Air Ministry, who had ample opportunity of gauging the situation, wrote to me as follows, shortly after the House of Lords Inquiry opened :—

> **"If there is anything I can do for you I shall be most happy. I cannot help feeling implicated (though quite innocently) in the scurvy treatment you received, and I never shall be able to understand it. Seeing that your Inquiry has begun I must send you a line to wish you success and satisfaction for the way you were treated. It has always been a cause of deep regret to me that though one could see that a faction was working against you from the first day you took on at the Cecil,* one was powerless to render you any effectual help against the more or less hidden foe."**

Despite the overwhelming preponderance of emphatic evidence given in my favour by the large majority of reliable men and women with whom I had worked, from Sir Godfrey Paine downwards—who only a few days before my dismissal was my immediate Chief—their Lordships have accepted the opinion of Mrs. Beatty, Miss Andrew, and Miss Pratt, who hardly knew me, and dismissing the evidence in my favour as "*negative*," have depicted me as one who subjected her staff to such

* The Air Ministry.

indignities, that they were driven to throw up their posts as the only means of escape.

The Attorney-General's statement that I was "*unfit to be left in control of the Women's Royal Air Force,*" coupled with General Seely's significant letter to the National Political League "*that in the best interests of the W.R.A.F., it was necessary that Miss Douglas-Pennant's connection with that Force should cease,*" has had the most serious consequences for me. They would have been even more disastrous in the case of an official whose livelihood and that of his family depended entirely on employment which he could never again hope to obtain in view of such a damaging record, coupled with summary dismissal. It is for the sake of those who, owing to honest and faithful service, have been penalised, that I have consented to write this statement, and expose the true facts.

The astonishing pronouncement of their Lordships that I never was Commandant does not appear to affect the question as to why I was dismissed. In any case, it reflects not on me but on the Air Council, who undoubtedly appointed me, who announced my appointment in the Press, and under whose directions I assumed the uniform, badges, and responsibilities of Commandant, with the rank of Brigadier-General, received the £20 uniform allowance, and who allowed me and all concerned to believe throughout that I was the Commandant.

The further startling decision of their Lordships that I never was in the W.R.A.F., safeguards the position of the Air Ministry, by debarring me from coming within the protection of the Regulations under which I accepted service, and thrusts me into the category of persons "temporarily employed."

The Court, however, appears to have forgotten that temporary officials, including junior clerks and charwomen, are granted a week's notice, yet I, who presumably could expect the same privileges, was instantly dismissed, without a moment's grace.

The refusal of my Counsel to call Mrs. Kitto and the alleged episode related by Lord Stanhope in the House

of Lords on information he received from Colonel Defries, could in no way account for my dismissal, as those incidents did not arise until many months after I was removed from the Force.

A close study and analysis of the evidence narrows it down to one point—*a point that to this day has never been elucidated*—namely, the secret and "serious statement" which Lady Rhondda received from Miss P. Strachey, Secretary of the Women's Service Bureau (London Suffrage Society), and a total stranger to me. This information she communicated—first to Sir Auckland Geddes, who imparted it to the Parliamentary Secretary, Major Baird (now Sir John Baird) in an interview, then to Lord Weir in a letter, with the result that Lord Weir, to quote their Lordships' words in the Report, "was practically compelled" by Sir Auckland Geddes to order my instant dismissal. This document, however, was not produced during the Inquiry, as, when called for by my Counsel, it was stated that *both the original and the copy had been "lost" by the Ministry of National Service and the Air Ministry respectively* (*see* page 369).

The only thing allowed to transpire during the Inquiry about this mysterious statement was the fact that Lady Rhondda's Counsel, Mr. Barrington Ward, stated that he did not want to ask Lady Rhondda what Miss Strachey said in her communication, and that Lady Rhondda declared in her evidence that Miss Strachey felt that the circumstances were so serious that she did not feel justified in recommending officers or rank and file to join the W.R.A.F.

Mr. Tyson Wilson alone has had the courage to own that he was misled by the information supplied to him by Mrs. Beatty, which at the time convinced him of my unworthiness for the post of Commandant, and that it was his duty to take immediate steps to bring about my dismissal.

It will be remembered that he informed several witnesses that the Secretary of the Air Ministry assured him that the charges proved against me, and admitted by

me, were so serious that if made public I "could never hold up my head again," and that Lord Weir, after giving me every chance of defending myself, had no choice but to dismiss me instantly (*see* pages 214-216).

What was this secret and "serious statement" which has been allowed to ruin my whole career? I have never been permitted to know, and, therefore, it is impossible for me even to attempt to refute it, but I now challenge Lady Rhondda and Miss Strachey to make their accusations public, however serious they may be, and the names of the persons on whose authority the charges were made, so that the public may know, and I may at last know definitely, what has been secretly alleged against me.

The reason why Miss Philippa Strachey herself was not subpœnaed by me and called to account for her share in this inexplicable affair was that until we heard the evidence of Lady Rhondda on the last day of the Inquiry long after my case was closed, neither I nor my legal advisers had ever heard of Miss Strachey's action, as she is quite unknown to me.

Under cross-examination, Lady Rhondda acknowledged that Miss Strachey had obtained the information on which this statement was based from Mrs. Beatty, an officer in the W.R.N.S. under Dame K. Furze, and from Miss Andrew, and that she (Lady Rhondda) had subsequently asked Mrs. Beatty to come and see her with regard to it, and further, that she saw Dame K. Furse on the matter before she went to see Lord Weir and General Brancker.

Though Miss Strachey's statement remains a mystery, a short extract from Lady Rhondda's written communication to Sir Auckland Geddes has been made public. It was published in a White Paper, nearly a year after my dismissal, and contains very serious unfounded allegations regarding my administration (*see* page 360).

Up to that moment I had never heard of the existence of this document, which was put forward as the cause of my dismissal. It was kept secret—not only from me, the

person accused—but from my Chief, Sir Godfrey Paine, from my Staff, and from all those who would have refuted it immediately. Copies, on the other hand, were forwarded by Sir Auckland Geddes to Mr. Bonar Law (Chancellor of the Exchequer), Sir Eric Geddes (First Lord of the Admiralty), and to Lord Milner (Secretary of State for War), and a few days later I was summarily dismissed, without inquiry, by Lord Weir.

As Lady Rhondda's statement contained such grave inaccuracies and accusations, I would ask her to explain what ground she had for stating, eight weeks after I became Commandant:

1. That no steps had been taken to place the W.R.A.F. under the control of Women Officers, though the slightest inquiry would have shown Lady Rhondda that in spite of the fact that the Air Ministry had only provided me with accommodation for training 25 officers at a time, I succeeded in training 480 to supplement the 73 officers who formed the total number before my appointment. This was rendered possible by my having secured the generous loan of Avery Hill Training College from the London County Council, though it was not available until the end of July, only a short time before I was summarily dismissed.
2. Why Lady Rhondda informed Sir Auckland Geddes that the W.R.A.F. was only two months junior to the W.R.N.S., although it was common knowledge that Dame K. Furse was appointed Director of the W.R.N.S, in **November, 1917,** though I did not become Commandant of the W.R.A.F., until **June 18th, 1918.**

Lady Rhondda declared, in her evidence, that she could not remember from what source she obtained this information. To quote her words:—

> **"I have not the least idea what individual told me. . . . I cannot tell you where I got my information from,"**

but she admitted that she had consulted Dame K. Furse, Mrs. Beatty, and Miss Andrew.

In view of these circumstances, which have had such serious consequences for me, it is difficult to understand why Lady Rhondda denied in her evidence that she had "either directly or indirectly influenced" Lord Weir or General Brancker to bring about my dismissal, more especially as in her letter to *The Times* she acknowledged

that she had advised Sir Auckland Geddes in this matter (*see* page 168).

These facts, taken in conjunction with the evidence of Dame K. Furse, Mrs. Beatty, and Miss Andrew, combined with the threat that my dismissal would be brought about unless I consented to make appointments which I knew to be unsuitable, link up the whole matter, and would seem to afford very definite proof of intrigue, although their Lordships decided, in spite of evidence to the contrary given by Mrs. Steel (*see* pages 346-347) :—

> "That there was no intrigue, no concerted action by the parties accused, or any of them, to induce or compel Miss Douglas-Pennant's removal or resignation by any improper means."

It is possible, however, that in view of this decision, thoughtful people may ask themselves *how* in that case Lady Rhondda, Mr. Tyson Wilson, M.P., and Miss Strachey (none of whom had any dealings with the W.R.A.F., and two of whom had never seen me) became aware that certain people alleged that it was necessary in the public interest to urge Lord Weir to dismiss me.

The question may also be asked whether Lord Weir and Sir Auckland Geddes realised that the information received by Mr. Tyson Wilson, Lady Rhondda, and Miss Strachey, emanated from the same source, *i.e.*, Mrs. Beatty and Miss K. Andrew.

Their Lordships' pronouncement that no "*improper means*" were used "to induce or compel" my removal, seems to call for a definition as to what in future will be regarded as "*improper means.*"

If officers are to be permitted to disregard the Regulations without incurring censure, to hold protest meetings of Junior Officers to raise an agitation in the Press and in the House of Commons, to communicate secretly with and interview the Secretary of State and Members of Parliament, in order to bring about the dismissal of their Senior Officer, surely a state of chaos will be set up which will lead to the destruction of an honest Public Service.

The verdict of the Committee on this point, cutting as it does at the very root of the principles of loyalty and

discipline, has aroused consternation among those who have endeavoured in the past to promote and maintain a sense of honour and *esprit de corps* in the Government Service, the subsequent action of the authorities in conferring high decorations and important appointments on the ringleaders in this affair (even on those who were censured by the Committee for deserting their posts in War time) has indicated further the policy which seems to prevail.

Those who have read this statement will realise that in my case the true facts are that I was dismissed at the instance of Mrs. Beatty, Miss Andrew, and their friends, who were determined that the W.R.A.F. should not succeed unless it remained under their control.

I have already shown that neither of these Officers was qualified to decide whether I was or was not suitable to be Commandant. Mrs. Beatty had been the cause of friction, insubordination, and the subject of two Inquiries for grave irregularities in another Corps (*see* page 308). Miss K. Andrew resented the fact that owing to her lack of experience and qualifications I was unable to place her in charge of the W.R.A.F. Recruiting Department, to give the command of the W.R.A.F. in Scotland to her friend, who had been adversely reported on during training, and to appoint as an officer a most unsuitable woman. If required, I can give full details of my reasons for not appointing certain candidates recommended by these officers (*see* pages 83-86).

This statement will show the dangers of the precedent set up by Lord Weir, under which a public servant, however innocent, may be discredited for life, without any inquiry, on the slander of unscrupulous subordinates. No redress is apparently considered necessary if the Secretary of State can claim that he acted in good faith, in what he honestly believed at the time to be the public interest. Surely elementary justice demands that though, as in Lord Weir's case, the Head of a Ministry may be entirely exonerated from any suspicion of personal malice or intrigue, the officer injured by his Chief's hasty action and *neglect to make any enquiry*, should not be left in the

position of a guilty person and penalised accordingly for the rest of his life. I would ask Lord Weir, who has repeatedly admitted that he did not make any enquiry into the truth of the allegations before summarily dismissing me, whether he is prepared to show to the satisfaction of those outside the Air Ministry, that it would have been in the best interests of the Corps if I had won the approval of Mrs. Beatty, and Miss Andrew, and their friends, by acquiescing in their wishes and by consenting to be a party to the irregularities and lack of discipline which prevailed in the W.R.A.F. before I became Commandant.

I offer my sincere apologies for the unavoidable length of this statement, due to the numerous and complex matters raised in their Lordships' Report, and to the necessity for quoting long extracts from the evidence in order to illustrate, as far as possible, many important points that were either ignored or misrepresented during the Inquiry.

Finally, it is my reply to the unmerited attack levelled at me in the House of Lords by Lord Curzon, December 13th, 1919. I listened to his words of condemnation unrepentant and unashamed, as I was convinced that the day would come when in the light of further knowledge he would be anxious to withdraw his wholly undeserved strictures.

Painful as it has been to set down this matter with its revelation of the methods resorted to by those in high places in order to hush up the case, I am glad to have had the opportunity of making clear many points which were obscured during the Inquiry, particularly the mystery surrounding Mrs. Kitto (*see* pages 404-418). The numerous examples of waste and inefficiency disclosed almost daily in the Press have already opened the eyes of the public to the fact that all is not well under the present system which exists in certain Government Departments.

Greatly as I have been misrepresented and misunderstood by those who are unaware of the truth, or who are

prejudiced parties, I can only say that if the stand I have made results in proper safeguards being insisted upon to protect the individual in the future from the treatment meted out to me, all that I have gone through will not have been in vain, and I shall feel amply rewarded.

In spite of the apparent triumph of evil I am convinced that the truth will prevail, and that underhand methods, slander and perjury will be exposed. "The mills of God grind slowly," but I am content to wait in the certainty that the moment of my vindication will come, for I have full confidence in the innate sense of justice and fairplay of the British public when once it is aware of the true facts.

APPENDIX.

Proofs of Public Opinion.

Throughout the whole trying period from the time of her summary dismissal from the Women's Royal Air Force to that immediately after the decisions arrived at by the House of Lords Inquiry were published, Miss Douglas-Pennant was the recipient of hundreds of letters of sympathy and indignation, many of them from men and women who had served with or under her during her long years of public service; and many others from strangers in all parts of the world, who had followed, with the keenest interest, as much of the proceedings as they could glean from reports that appeared in the Press.

Incidentally, many of the letters provide striking refutations of the charge of "unpopularity and want of tact" which their Lordships not only considered "proved," but stigmatised most severely. Therefore, the Publication Committee consider it advisable to publish the following brief extracts from a very few of the letters, selected as generally representative of all—

From a W.R.A.F. Officer.

". . . . All the time I was remembering your advice. . . . . You always sent us off to work with such a thrilling desire to succeed, and one feels all through that one must work up towards your standard. I am so proud that you chose me as one of your officers, and I am determined that you will not be disappointed in the end. May I keep in touch with you?"

From a W.R.A.F. Probationary Officer.

"I am one of the rejected Probationary Officers of the Eltham Training Course* that caused such controversy in the Press and Parliament last Autumn.

"I had the privilege of being selected by Miss Douglas-Pennant as a prospective officer of the W.R.A.F., and saw her three times before her dismissal. I assure you that her charm of manner, her courtesy, and her obvious efficiency, filled me with a degree of confidence I I have rarely felt for anyone. As Commandant, she came to address the Cadets after our training course had commenced, and she was a real inspiration to each one of us. I did not hear one of the Cadets speak of her but in the highest terms of respect and affection . . . . I beg you to excuse me for trespassing on your time, my only reason is that Miss Douglas-Pennant's popularity seems to have been questioned."

* *i.e.*, Avery Hill (*see* pages 160–162).

From a W.R.A.F. Probationary Officer.

"... Your opening lecture, and the lectures given by Captain Hedges were so interesting, and we were all determined to pass our examination, and I still cannot believe you are not our Commandant, so much did we all think of you."

From a Sergeant.

"I am sorry you lost the case, but I am sure there are a good many people about, including myself, who admire you in your gallant stand for 'Righteous.' Alas, it is only too true, how some of the Camps were run; unless one does as Rome does, they stood no chance. Having served from 1914 to 1919, and served three years in France I had the opportunity of seeing a good many things which the general public had no idea were going on.

"You may rest assured you did your duty in exposing the true state of affairs.

"Far better to lose your case by speaking the truth, than win it by speaking the untruth."

From an Air Mechanic who returned to New Zealand.

"I am sending you a sprig of New Zealand heather and wish to express my sincere admiration of your splendid work in connection with the W.R.A.F. and other institutions, and hope that you may, in spite of little minds, long continue to do so."

From a R.A.F.

"I know that you are quite justified in standing up for your right. I am only a Tommy left with one leg and one eye, but I am from your Camp, so don't think me mad. Stand to it as you did at the Camp."

From a Fellow-Worker.

"My experience at the Air Ministry forces me to the conclusion that they did not desire the services of any efficient officers who were only prepared to 'run straight.'

"I can never forget the long hours and strain at the W.R.A.F., and the injustice done for 'good work.' The Staff ... also feel keenly how badly you have been treated."

From Colonel Sir Theodore Morison, K.C.I.E., Principal of Armstrong College, Newcastle-on-Tyne.

"My lost letter to you had only the value of being the expression of my feelings at the time, which were mainly gratitude to you for the very 'straight' way in which you had settled the question of my daughter's position. .... The accusation that you were rude to everybody who came to the office is really preposterous. I can bear witness that you were altogether the reverse, and I was a total stranger, calling upon purely official business."

From a Brig.-General.

"I cannot tell you how sorry I am to find the opinion of the Committee—so far as it goes—unfavourable to you, but I do hope that on the question of your dismissal it will be completely reversed.

"I always felt the danger of false evidence swamping you—the witnesses against you stopped at nothing.

"You have been most brave. Your friends still believe all you have said, and tried to prove; but you had the strongest organisation in the country against you, and I should say, the President of the Committee."

Extract from a copy of a letter sent to the Chairman of the Douglas-Pennant Committee, the original having been addressed to the Chairman of the Women's Service Bureau by a girl clerk.

"In the interests of justice, I feel I must write to you and offer my opinion on the Douglas-Pennant Case.

"During the war, I was a clerk at the Air Ministry, and heard a good many things said most defamatory to that lady's character. Never having met the aforesaid Miss Douglas-Pennant I did not know whether to believe these things or not, but was somewhat nonplussed at the position of importance having been entrusted to apparently such a virago, and as I took great interest in anything connected with the R.A.F. I enquired of several people, who by their talk, I presumed were well acquainted with the lady, more about her. To my surprise, these people had to own that they had never met Miss D.P., had not even seen her, and yet were casting most virulent aspersions at her!

"Though only a minor clerk, I, in the interests of women, took upon myself to ring up the Commandant and ask for an interview, giving the excuse of wishing to find out how a friend of mine might join the W.R.A.F. I was quite surprised when she herself spoke to me on the telephone, having been led to believe that Miss D.P. never, if possible, spoke herself to people, and that if by chance she did, that she was extremely discourteous. She granted me an interview, and I later went round to the H.Q. of the W.R.A.F., where I found Miss D.P. a very charming lady, ready to give me any assistance and advice *re* my friend joining the Force. I should like to add that it was 10 p.m., and Miss D.P. was still hard at work, all alone, having sent her Staff home many hours ago. As a matter of fact, the porter at the door informed me that Miss D.P. went on working till all hours of the night, and wondered how she could stand it without getting ill.

"After that visit I saw her fairly often, and there have been many occurrences which have sincerely puzzled me. For instance:—Why, after she had been dismissed from the Corps on the excuse of being 'unpopular' and a 'bully,' was she called upon by the Air Ministry to go and see a poor W.R.A.F. girl who had been taken seriously ill. It was about 11 o'clock at night, and Miss D.P. got up and walked (failing to procure a taxi and the buses had stopped) right away beyond King's Cross to the girl's lodging, and nursed her and did what she could until the early hours of the morning when other assistance was able to be got. I believe the girl had pneumonia, and undoubtedly, without Miss D.P's timely assistance would have died. Please note that at the time, Miss D.P. had nothing earthly to do with the Force—having been dismissed! And yet, she apparently was the only person sufficiently 'popular' to be called in time of stress—and by the Air Ministry! . . . .

"A second instance:—The week after Miss D.P's dismissal, she received from the girls a memento in the form of a violet leather writing case. I happen to know some of the girls and they showed me the accompanying card on which was written:—'To "Our" Commandant, as a slight token of loyalty and appreciation of her sympathetic consideration.' This, from the very girls, who, by Mrs. Beatty's and Miss Andrew's accounts, Miss D.P. had 'bullied' and been 'unpopular' with. Can you account for it?

"Further, it was common knowledge that Mrs. Beatty and Miss Andrew were intensely annoyed at Miss D.P. refusing to give certain friends of these two ladies posts. . . . . Why, I wonder, were the

statements of these two ladies taken as gospel, with no effort whatsoever made to ascertain if there were another side to the question?

"If a mere clerk had the initiative in the interest of justice to try and find out whether a woman was being maligned, is it not astounding that a number of ladies, in undoubtedly important posts, did not take the trouble to as much as enquire where truth lay? And ruined an innocent party without giving her a hearing, thereby being accomplices in a most horrible injustice."

From Sir Joseph Davies.

". . . . The one outstanding fact is that you have at the Air Board done work of the greatest value in the interest of the Nation. You have sacrificed everything to it; your time, your ability, and even your health. You have nothing to look back to with regrets or with the feeling 'I might have done otherwise.'

"I have, particularly during the war years, come in contact with leading people in all parts of Wales, and I know how universally you and your work are appreciated. From people of all shades of thought, politics, and religion. I have only heard one opinion, that in everything you undertake, you carry it through with conspicuous ability, and that your one desire has always been to act in the best interest of the public. . . . . The time will come when you will receive the credit due to the splendid work you have done."

From a distinguished Surgeon.

"The evils that you speak of are incredible indeed—except to those who know, as you and I do. It is a superhuman task you have undertaken—yet victory would mean more to the country than did the crushing of German militarism. You assail the cancer, which, if it is not eradicated, will drag the old country down. But already its roots go very deep into our vitals. . . . . But there, you knew! And it is refreshing to find that you do—and that one at least dares!"

From the Bishop of Bangor.

"May I take the opportunity, not only to wish you a Happy New Year, but also to express my sympathy with you, for what you have gone through the last few months. Many of the comments, such as Lord Curzon's speech, have made me indignant, but I have no doubt that it was a wise policy not to reply. I hope that the ensuing months will open out to you fresh avenues of honour and usefulness, worthy of your talents, and that this last year may be forgotten as a bad dream."

From the Secretary of the North Wales Quarreymen's Union.

"From our knowledge of Miss Pennant, and our experience of her work as Insurance Commissioner, we can assure you that all Societies in North Wales have the highest regard for her administrative capacity, fair dealings, and her efficiency as a Public Official, and we feel that the purity and efficiency of our Public Service demands a thorough inquiry into the cause of her dismissal from the W.R.A.F."

From the Hon. Secretary, General Committee for the Promotion of the Medical Training of Women, Hon. Treasurer, Aberdare Hall (Hospital for Women Students of University College, Cardiff).

"I have worked on many Committees with Miss Douglas-Pennant, and was much impressed by her wise judgment and high sense of public duty. She always took a wide and impersonal view of things, and was never satisfied with second-rate work. Miss Douglas-Pennant served on the Executive of the General Committee for the Promotion

of the Medical Training of Women, of which I am Hon. Secretary, and gave most valuable assistance as a member of the Sub-Committee appointed to interview and report on Applicants for grants or loans. The Executive has recently by Resolution refused to accept Miss Douglas-Pennant's resignation from the Committee.

"Miss Douglas-Pennant was a member of the Council of Aberdare Hall, the Hostel for Women Students of University College, Cardiff, of which I am Hon. Treasurer; and she served on the Committee of the Welsh Hospital Unit for Serbia (S.W.H.), of which I was Hon. Secretary. I think her withdrawal from public work a real loss to the Committees on which she served.

"In dismissing her from the W.R.A.F., I believe the authorities not only did a grave injustice to Miss Douglas-Pennant, but deprived the Service of a most efficient and high-minded officer, who, had she been given the opportunity, I feel sure would have secured and maintained a high standard of work in the W.R.A.F."

From Lt.-Col. T. J. Greenaway, Salvation Army, a fellow-worker over Belgian Refugees.

"You will pardon me writing this letter, but I gather now that it is these great moral principles which have been at stake, and personally I think your case ought to have been thrashed out long before. We, who have had practical experience of your work for the welfare of the people, know that anything of the character described by Lord Stanhope (referring to the women of our country) understand that in your hands the spiritual and moral welfare of the people are safe. . . . . I have very happy recollections of the toil with you in the early days of the War, when such boundless chances came our way to do good to the victims of the War and others."

From the Secretary, Appointments Board, Wales.

"Your letter . . . . . was considered by the Appointments Board at its meeting, and it was unanimously resolved to ask you to reconsider your resignation.

"Every Member expressed a strong view that you ought not to be allowed to resign. Every Member present expressed his or her appreciation of the services you have rendered to the Board. Several Members also said very definitely that this unfortunate affair was not going to be left where it is at present. This view was expressed by Sir Vincent Evans, Lord Kenyon, and others.

"I feel sure that you could not have helped being touched by the affectionate regard in which you are held by the best representatives of your Nation."

From Dr. Perrie Morris, Chief Woman Organiser, Board of Agriculture, Wales.

"When the news of your summary dismissal became known in Wales, there arose a wave of indignation. Those of us who have the privilege of knowing you, and of appreciating the wonderful work you have done for many years past, both in Wales and out of it, were more than indignant. To talk of your alleged 'gross unpopularity' seems too ridiculous, when we know that it has always been quite the reverse with everyone who came into contact with you."

From Mr. Thomas Jones, late Secretary to the National Health Insurance Commission (Wales).

"I have just seen a summary of the Report, and am deeply grieved to think of all you must be suffering. It is too melancholy and tragic

for words. It can make not the slightest difference to those of us who know you—that may be some little comfort at this dark hour."

From a Vicar in Wales.

"It is certain :—

1. That you won the moral victory.
2. That the moral of the camps was at the lowest level.
3. The bold attempt to clean the Augean Stable roused resentment, and you were made to suffer for doing your duty.

"This is the conviction of the public. I will say nothing of your Chairman—or of Lady Rhondda!

"You have come out of it with a clear conscience—supported by superb courage—carrying their full reward."

From a Branch Secretary, Girls' Friendly Society.

"I am very sorry to lose your name from my Branch of the Girls' Friendly Society; but I can quite understand your feelings. As for us, and all the Members of the Society, you stand in our opinion as you have always stood, and we shall hail the day when we shall have the honour of your name on our list again."

From Dame Adelaide Livingstone, Secretary, Prisoners of War Committee.

"It was only when I read the papers last night that I realised how cruelly you have been attacked, and how completely your motives in bringing your action have been misread. It is incredible that you should have been so misunderstood—and it is difficult to believe that even lawyers really *think* that your motive was to 'salve your wounded vanity,' etc., etc.

"It would be impertinent of me to write and tell you this were it not for the fact that one wishes to put on record one's absolute disbelief in the cruel allegations made against you."

From Dr. Mary Davies.

". . . . It is quite certain that Mrs. Lloyd George's experience of your personal help to her on the National Fund Committee, as well as on the Insurance and Baby Welfare, would be enough in itself to refute such a monstrously absurd excuse as that given by General Brancker. It must be either jealousy of your success or personal spite of some kind on his part. Will you pardon my saying, that so far as I have had experience of public life in Wales, I know no individual who has won the esteem and personal attachment that you have done, ever since you took a prominent part in public life."

From Councillor W. Thoresby Cooksey, J.P., Chairman of Group 2, South Islington L.C.C. Schools Committee.

"As one who deeply sympathises with Miss Douglas-Pennant in her fight for her rights, and also for her courage in fighting so hard, I would do all in my power to force the Government to grant her demand. The great work she has done for the children of London, especially the children of the L.C.C. Schools, has made her many loyal friends. We in South Islington will never forget her talks to the children and the encouragement the Hon. Violet Douglas-Pennant has given to teachers and to all who take a real interest in the children of our L.C.C. Schools."

From the Principal of an L.C.C. Training College.

"I enclose you the leader in the *Manchester Guardian* this morning on the result of the Enquiry. It is so good . . . that I think it may be a little gratification to you to have it.

"I should like also to add how intensely sorry all of us here are that the matter should have gone the way it did. From the point of view of the enquiry, none of us had the slightest doubt that you were correct, but I personally have too much knowledge of bureaucratic methods not to understand that where the officials choose to line up shoulder to shoulder it is almost an impossibility for the outsider to break through and prove anything.

"You have from the College the best wishes of everyone of us, myself included."

From a Stranger.

"As a sincere lover of truth and justice, I should like to express my sympathy and unity with you in the very trying circumstances in which you are placed, and to wish you God-speed in your brave effort to bring about a better state of things in the Public Service. It is so difficult for any of us to bring pressure to bear on wrongs which we so often feel instinctively to exist, and to find firm ground on which to work for their reform, where the personal interest of some who hold important positions is involved . . . .

"I have right through been amongst those who would have preferred that our women might have been kept free from active participation in the horrible details of this war—but, if by taking part they are able to bring about a 'cleaner' state of things in our public departments, it will be one of the very few benefits which have come about owing to the terrible experiences through which we have passed."

From the late Vice-Chairman, Association of Women Clerks and Secretaries.

"I feel I must send you a line to say how very much I feel for you, and how furious I am with the gang which has brought about this situation; of course, it is the old, old story of the jealousy and pettiness of the incompetent man for the competent women. It is horrible for you to be in this position, but you have the entire sympathy of all women workers, many of whom have had to suffer in the same way, through the jealousy of men. I am earnestly hoping, I may say even praying, that this present situation as regards yourself will bring about a better position all round for the competent woman-worker."

From the Chairman, S. Wales Branch, Welsh Housing and Development Committee.

"Your letter of the 7th inst. was read at the Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Welsh Housing and Development Association, and I, being in the Chair, was desired to write to you and express our indignation at the intolerable insult to which you have been subjected, and to express our sympathy with you. In your attendance at our meetings, we have always recognised your courtesy, tact, and charm of manner, and cannot believe for a moment that the reason alleged for the cruel blow inflicted upon you was the real one."

From the Registrar, University College of South Wales and Monmouthshire, Cardiff.

"I submitted your letter of January 16th, 1919, to the Court of Governors at its Meeting held yesterday, and the following resolution was passed, viz.:—

"'That in view of the fact that the resignation of the Hon. Violet Douglas-Pennant as a Member of the Court has been tendered in consequence of the stigma cast on her by her summary dismissal

from the post of Commandant of the Women's Royal Air Force, and recognising that unless that stigma is removed, she will perforce feel it impossible to resume any of her public work, this Court is not prepared to accept Miss Douglas-Pennant's resignation, as its confidence in her remains quite unabated, and further, that with a view to satisfying the public that no injustice is being done to a public servant, the Court most cordially supports her demand for a full and impartial inquiry into all the circumstances that led to her dismissal.' "

From the Hon. Secretary of a War Fund.

"I hope you will allow me to write to say how shocked I am at the dastardly treatment that has been meted out to you in connection with the W.R.A.F. To those who, like myself, have had the privilege of co-operating with you, it is unthinkable that you should be allowed to remain under the stigma of 'summary dismissal.' . . . There are many Augean Stables to be cleansed, and it is high time that the light of day is allowed to permeate more than one Department."

From a National Health Insurance Commissioner.

"I need hardly say how bitterly disappointed I feel at the Report of the Committee of Inquiry, from which I had hoped your position would have been satisfactorily cleared up, instead of being made more complicated. . . . .

"You are the one to whom I most looked for sympathy and support in any difficult problems which had to be regarded from a woman's point of view, and when I say that I found you always ready to advise, help, and, if necessary, give active support, I am stating no more than the fact.

"I feel it is almost impossible to conceive how anyone could place you in the light in which you have recently been depicted—at any rate, it is entirely at variance with your actions during my experience of you as a colleague.

"I know that your course of action was entirely dictated by the feeling that you had a public duty to perform, and I hope you will not allow this unfortunate result to deter you from continuing your interest in public affairs."

From a Fellow-Worker.

"I would like to tell you how very much my sympathy has been with you all through this enquiry. I continue to think that you have been entirely right in what you said was the state of things in the Air Force, and the verdict of the Chairman of the Committee, who from start to finish was obviously biassed against you, leaves me and many others quite unconvinced. If half of what Women Commandants have had to suffer was known to the country it would certainly astonish it, and I think the result of what you have gone through will be that, in future, women in the position you were in will not be treated with sheer injustice if they intervene to prevent moral wrong . . . ."

From a War-Worker.

"As one who has followed with great interest your case against the authorities, will you allow me to express my warmest wishes for your success, and my heartiest congratulations on your courage in having carried the matter thus far?

"I have—throughout my war work in Government offices—observed similar instances of injustice towards women heads of departments, the victims of which had their careers crushed by the action of the

authorities. Every injustice proved against the latter, acts as a precedent and a deterrent in future cases, thus, you are fighting not merely for yourself, but for your weaker sisters, and for the equality of treatment between men and women generally."

From a Fellow-Worker, to a Newspaper.

"You were good enough, some few weeks ago, to voice the gratitude of 'every Public Servant and British Citizen' to Miss Violet Douglas-Pennant for the principle she was upholding in their defence and her own. To us of the rank and file, who have had the inestimable privilege of working under her at one time and another, the result of her Inquiry is of the most vital importance, for we know from experience for what order she stands, and in whose interests she has allowed herself to be thus penalised. May we, therefore, through the courtesy of your columns, convey to her the assurance of our appreciative admiration, with every good wish for her victory, which means so much to all of us. . . . . Miss Douglas-Pennant has all the confidence and loyalty of the rank and file. Good luck to her and to her cause."

From a Temporary Officer, R.A.F.

"I would have written last week. . . . . It was nothing else but a covering up matter, for the great wrong and injustice which they have done you, me knowing and also what other officers have told me, the uphill fight you had against overwhelming odds. There has been dirty work going on, not worthy the name of a Britisher. **Am I doing wrong in asking if the matter ends here?"**

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